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A HAPPY FIND

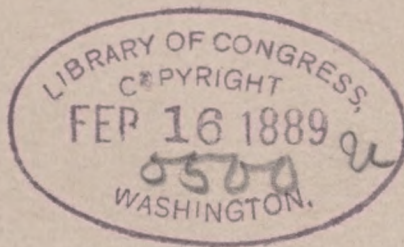
TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

OF

MADAME GAGNEBIN.

BY

MISS E. V. LEE.



NEW YORK

THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.

13 ASTOR PLACE

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A HAPPY FIND.

CHAPTER I.

ROLAND FINDS THE BABY.

“WHAT did you say? A child? Are you in earnest?”

“Am I in earnest?”

“Did any one ever hear anything like it!”

“Have you seen it?”

“No, but if you don’t believe it, go and ask Aunt Ursula; she knew it before I did, since it was Roland who found it.”

Without further discussion, the two speakers hurried off, and soon joined a group of women, all speaking at once, evidently moved by some extraordinary agitation.

At the approach of the new comers, the noise increased. “Have you met him?” — “Did he show it to you?” — “Is it not dreadful?” cried several voices.

“Who? What?” answered the latest comer, breathlessly.

“Roland; don’t you know that he has just found a little baby?”

“I have just heard so, but I could not believe it,” and the woman looked around, incredulously.

"Where have they taken it?" asked she, at last.

"Do you want to adopt it?" roughly answered a tall woman, dry and thin, wrinkled by trouble, rather than by age.

"Why — I would not say no, if I did not have more than my share already."

"Well, it is just for that reason that I have told that little scamp to go and put his foundling where he found it."

A disapproving murmur was heard. Dame Ursula straightened herself.

"Yes, you may preach, all of you. Am I not already keeping Roland out of charity? Which of you would do as much?"

"I, I," cried several voices.

The *paysanne* put her arms akimbo and laughed, though rather awkwardly, as if she were unaccustomed to it.

"You shall not have him, all the same. I have brought him up. I will keep him. When I begin a good work, I like to finish it."

"But," said a cracked, little voice, "you ought to be just, Ursula; if his father does not send you money you pay yourself in another fashion, which comes to the same thing, in the end."

"What do you mean, Aunt Rose?"

"Oh! nothing but what everybody knows," responded the old woman, with a mischievous smile.

"But all this is an old story," cried one of the new comers, "that does not tell us what Roland has done with the baby. You ought to have kept it a little while, Ursula; that would not have forced you to keep it, always."

"To show it to you — eh?" retorted the *paysanne*, "as if you did not see a baby every year, regularly. Well, I can tell you that this one is like all the rest, though I did not waste my time in looking at it."

"But, all the same, one must admit that it is very extraordinary!"

Everybody looked at the one who had made such an astonishing remark.

Dame Ursula shrugged her shoulders.

"In these days, one is never astonished; besides, rich people are always extraordinary."

"Rich people! What do you mean by that?"

"Yes, rich people. When did you ever know the poor desert their children?"

"Oh! as for that, you are right, but what makes you think that this one" —

"What makes me think so? I have eyes, and good ones, thank God. It did not take me long to notice the shawl, white as snow, and the finest merino, — the shawl in which the little creature was wrapped. You may believe me, whoever deserted that child is better off than we are; but, as for knowing where it comes from, that is another thing. Ah! here is Roland."

All the women turned, and called together, —

“Come here, little boy ; quick, hurry, what have you done with the baby ? ”

The small boy, thus summoned, advanced as calmly as if he had not seen their impatience. As he approached them, he raised his curly head, and looked at them with clear blue eyes.

“Is it true that you have found a baby ? What have you done with it ? Where have you put it ? ”

For all answer, the child burst out with a merry laugh.

“Answer,” cried Aunt Ursula, craning her wrinkled neck.

Roland recovered his gravity.

“Aunt Martha is going to keep it ; we are going to name it to-morrow, and I shall be the godfather.”

The women all laughed. The child crimsoned, and tried to run off, but Aunt Ursula held his arm.

“Why did you carry it to that Huguenot ? Don’t you know I forbid you to go there ? ”

“I did not mean to give it to her. I wanted to give it to the young lady at the cottage.”

“And why didn’t you ? ”

“The old servant was waiting for me.”

“Are you crazy ? The old servant was waiting for you ! What do you mean ? ”

The child hesitated.

“She saw ” —

“Who saw ? ”

"The old servant at the cottage saw me when I found the baby behind the hedge, near the path, but I did not show it to her; I ran away, because I wanted to keep it for ourselves; then, she waited for me."

"Ah, she waited for you! She knew, then, that I would none of it. . . And why didn't she take you to her mistress? The young lady would have kept it, certainly."

"She could not. She died this morning."

"Dead! The lady at the cottage is dead?"

There was a moment of silence.

"One would think that house was bewitched," said Aunt Ursula, at last.

All the women nodded.

"Roland's mother died there six months after her arrival, and the young lady,—let me see, how long is it since she came? Why, would you believe it, just six months, almost to a day?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Ursula," interrupted a scolding voice. "Whether a house is bewitched or not one is liable to die. Roland's mother was so sick when she came, that it was a miracle she lived so long; as for the other, it is my opinion that it is grief that carried her off. It seems that she could not get over her husband's death."

"Who told you such stuff?"

"The old servant. But if she had not told me, I should have guessed that she was dying of grief, just from seeing her pale face, and great sad eyes."

"What is that to us?" interrupted one of the old women, with a sigh. "I saw her at the window, not more than two or three days ago. I was carrying my Louise's youngest, and as I looked up in passing, she smiled at the little one; I cannot tell you how, but that smile went to my very heart."

"Now, hush! all of you," interrupted a voice, "let Roland tell us how he had the idea of carrying his baby to the Huguenot."

"It was not my idea," answered the child, "the old servant advised me to go there."

"Well, go on, how did she meet you? Was she much surprised?"

"I did not ask her."

"But what did she do? tell us."

"When I told her that I had found it behind the hedge, near the road, and that I did not know what to do with it, since Aunt Ursula would not keep it, and the young lady was dead, she took it in her arms, and said something in a whisper, I don't know what; then she sent me to the shop, for she thought it would be hungry when it woke."

"Think of the Huguenot with a baby!" cried one of the women, her voice instantly drowned in the laughter of the rest.

"Don't be afraid, she will soon be tired of that business," added Aunt Ursula. "In a fortnight, the little one will be sent to the asylum."

Roland's blue eyes shone with indignation, but he did not speak, but moved away quickly, leaving the women to their suppositions.

Such a marvellous event, never before known at Silveréal, kept them long enough from their duties, and that fact was only realized with the darkness of the night.

The sun had long disappeared, the brilliant purple glow vanished slowly. The sea moaned in the little bay, and the white waves beat against the rocks. A cold, gray twilight had come, little by little, and then, only, did the remembrance of their duties return to them; and, frightened, they hurried to their fireless homes, certain of finding discontented husbands and crying children. But their neglect was not so unnatural, after all, for the finding of a baby is an event which does not happen every day.

CHAPTER II.

"HAVE PITY."

WHILE the good women dispersed, in more or less apprehension, Aunt Martha, the Huguenot, still upset by the extraordinary event which had put all the village in a turmoil, drew from the depths of her linen press a pile of clothes as white as snow, examined them one after the other, then, having carefully chosen the finest and softest, she went to work most vigorously.

All at once, a little cry, then several louder ones was heard. Aunt Martha rose, her pale face flushed slightly, her brown eyes were lit up with a softened light, and her mouth, usually a little proud, had a gentle expression, which would have surprised more than one inhabitant of the village. She crossed the room quickly, pushed open the door of a darkened chamber, and went towards a great bed, from which she lifted a tiny white bundle.

Before she seated herself, she paced the room several times, only stopping when the infant's piercing cries were a little quieted. Then she undid the shawl which enveloped it, and stopped, motionless with surprise. A square piece of paper, with the simple words "Have pity," written in an uncertain hand, was attached to the little chemise, and rested on the baby's breast. With a

trembling hand, Aunt Martha detached it, and looked at it for a long time, until two tears rolled down her cheeks.

What a profound revelation of sorrow, anguish, and love in those simple words! The Huguenot felt it. She examined the tiny clothes, one by one, turned and re-turned them, but nothing told her the parents' name, nor the cause of their desertion.

Aunt Martha resumed her task, but it was no easy matter for one so inexperienced. The little creature had begun to cry again, louder than ever, turning from one side to another her tiny face, purple with anger, and struggling to put her fist in her mouth.

Her toilette finished, Aunt Martha tried, not without some trepidation, to induce her to take some milk, which to her great relief, the little one drank eagerly; then, once satisfied, she remained quiet, her blue eyes fixed upon the half sad, half joyful ones which were watching her. At last, fatigue proved too much, and she slept.

Aunt Martha rose to deposit her light burden, then went to the kitchen and lit the fire. When she had finished her repast, and put all in order, she took down from its place a large Bible, turned the pages for an instant, then, clasping her hands, the Huguenot bent her forehead upon the Holy Book. The last hours of that day had witnessed an event as extraordinary as unexpected, and she felt the need of an interview with her heavenly friend.

Aunt Martha remained long in prayer; when she raised her head, her beautiful eyes sparkled, her heart beat with gratitude for this strange and marvellous gift which God had sent her.

Oh! how she would love this little creature; all the tenderness her heart had once contained, would blossom again for her. How happy she would make her! She would never be taken from her; the entreaty lying on her bosom was a pledge. And, happy in that thought, she went to work. The hours passed, and still she sewed. The linen, the little chemises grew as if by enchantment under her quick fingers. She did not perceive the flight of time, she never thought of looking at the great clock, whose hands made their accustomed round, all astonished at this illumination so late in the night.

Two or three times she slipped noiselessly into the adjoining room, to listen for some seconds to the gentle breathing of the little sleeper, then came back to her work, her heart filled with an emotion hitherto unknown. And while she sewed, tirelessly, dreaming of the little being that chance had placed in her arms, the night rolled away, tranquil and silent.

Everything seemed sleeping in the bay, even the great sea, whose waves broke noiselessly on the beach, all except Aunt Martha, whose heart sang a hymn of hope, never thinking that not far from her, on the edge of the forest, in the pretty cottage that Aunt Ursula had pronounced "bewitched," a poor creature, an old servant,

was watching, too. Motionless, near the bedside, where lay the remains of the last one she had loved, she seemed lost in contemplation of the young face, from which all trace of pain or grief had forever passed.

From time to time her wrinkled hand caressed the little clasped hands whose grace and delicacy she had so often admired, then she bent over the sweet face, waxen pale, and murmured tender words, to which neither the closed eyes nor silent lips could ever answer.

When the morning began to dawn, the old watcher rose, then slowly, as if it cost much to hide it from her sight, covered the pale face of the dead and went out. Aunt Martha had put out her light, and slept, a happy slumber, broken by strange dreams which made her smile and murmur words which no one heard nor could have understood.

CHAPTER III.

"AUNT MARTHA THE HUGUENOT."

No one in the village would have been able to tell exactly who was the one whom they called "Aunt Martha the Huguenot." They only knew one thing, and that was that her religion was different from theirs; and that doubtless explained why they left her alone, or why she chose to live so.

They did not stop willingly to gossip with her; in the first place, because they hardly knew what to talk about, in the second place, because they were afraid; and yet, many of the villagers remembered the day when, as a little girl, she came to the abbey accompanied by her father, who was very proud of being the last of one of the old Huguenot families whose faith neither sufferings nor persecution could conquer.

A few weeks before that, the report came to the village that the old abbey had found a purchaser; from that time, great had been the curiosity, and great was the disappointment when there came to the old homestead a crippled soldier, gray and scarred, accompanied by a little girl, with large brown eyes, simply dressed in black.

After that, the days passed at Silveréal as before. The

ex-soldier and his little girl, all alone in their establishment, rarely went to the village, and it was some time before they discovered that their presence was not agreeable to the inhabitants.

Huguenots at the abbey ! That had never been known, and never should have been. They tried to make the new proprietor understand it, but he wisely shut his ears to all the small talk and insinuations. At first they were astonished, then they asked themselves if he was not right, and soon they perceived that, if he spoke little, his words were worth a great deal, and that, what to the villagers was worth a great deal more, his purse was always open at the recital of sorrow.

Little by little, insinuations and ill-will gave way to respect and esteem ; they forgave the soldier the wrong of his birthright.

The years rolled away ; the old man's moustache had grown white, and his step less firm. Without admitting it, he was not sorry that his little Martha was now a strong young girl, on whose arm he could trustfully lean during their daily walks.

Martha saw her father grow weaker, and became anxious. He had been long since forced to renounce his visits to Arles where his old friend, formerly his chaplain, lived. It was now the latter's turn to come and inquire after the sick soldier.

The walks became shorter every day ; soon the soldier did not leave his seat before the house ; his pipe became

too much for him; the end was drawing near, and he watched its coming with a tranquil heart.

One evening he called his daughter to him, he was somewhat uneasy about her.

“I have done wrong, perhaps, to bring you here, Martha; I only thought of myself in leaving Arles, after your mother’s death; you will find yourself very lonely, you had better return there, if you should succeed in selling the abbey.”

“Do not worry about it, father.”

That was all she said, then she bent over to kiss the sick man’s brow, and went away to weep alone.

Some days later, notwithstanding the physician’s care, in spite of the pastor’s prayers, and his daughter’s grief, the old soldier went on his last furlough. He went with untroubled brow and joyous look, to lay all his burdens forever upon the friend who had never failed him.

Martha would have wished to remain at the abbey, in the midst of her cherished memories; but they would not let her; the old minister pleaded his cause so earnestly that she was forced to listen to him.

His home, he said, was very lonely, above all, during his son’s absence; later, when he came back, Martha could do as she chose, and return to the abbey if she wished. Meanwhile, why not come and brighten the home, and take the empty place? Martha obeyed, thinking only of accomplishing her new duties, and living for her old friend.

Two years passed, two years of a calm and happy life, at the end of which the old man saw his most ardent desire realized.

His son returned; his son, talented, courageous, came to take his place. It mattered little now if his strength diminished, his task would not remain unfinished, his child was there to take it up as he laid it down.

As to Martha, she must not go away, they needed her more than ever, and could not do without her.

So Martha stayed, and the old abbey remained closed and silent. But who ever thought of it? Not the young girl who felt herself day by day, more and more attached to the little parsonage and its inmates; nor the old pastor to whom she was at once, mother, daughter, and servant.

With her light step, Martha continued to go and come about the house, keeping all things in order, tending the garden, watching over all, thinking only of the well-being and happiness of her friends.

Time passes quickly when the heart is gay; for the young girl, it fled as in a dream; she only awaked one day when she held her old friend's cold hands in hers.

For the second time Martha was an orphan; but she was not alone in her sorrow, and she did not forget it. Henceforth, she lived only for the one who, like herself, had lost a father and adviser. Was it not her duty to aid him, to comfort him, whose activity knew no respite, who always forgot himself for others, who had only one

aim, one ambition,—to be found watching when the Master came? To protect him from all pain, all perplexity, to bring into his grave eyes a joyful light, a flash of gratitude, was Martha's only thought during all the hours of the day.

“Oh! if he had seen with what exact and tender care she prepared his repast, arranged his room, filled with flowers the vases on his bureau, rearranged the linen for his use. . . . But he saw nothing, remarked nothing; neither her grave beauty, nor slender and graceful figure; neither the music of her voice, the light of her eyes, nor the fleeting roses of her cheeks. He saw in Martha, only a sister, placed by Providence in his pathway, a sister who sought to brighten his life; and he thanked God for the gift, and showed his gratitude to her by accepting the sacrifice of her life and devotion.

One evening, several years later, as they were about to separate for the night, the young minister took Martha's hand in his, and told her in a moved voice that an angel, a fairy, he hardly knew what name to give her, would soon come to brighten his hearth, and share his life. At the same time, he begged her to remain with them; he was sure that his young wife would be glad of her advice, and Martha knew already that he loved her as a sister, and that her departure would grieve him greatly.

The light color which had mounted to the young girl's cheeks when she felt her hand thus imprisoned, had disappeared; she kept her eyes fixed upon the grave

face, whose every feature she knew so well; she saw the emotion which made his lips quiver and his eyes glow, and she could not speak.

"Martha, you do not answer me."

"God bless you, and make you happy, perfectly happy."

"You will stay, Martha; you will be her sister, as you have been mine."

"You will not need me." She drew her hand away slowly, smiled even, and sought her room.

Some weeks later the old abbey shutters, closed for six years, were wide open. The sunlight, joyous in meeting no obstacles, penetrated everywhere like a heedless child, who is only kept at a distance because compelled.

Martha had come back! Every one in the village had heard of it, and had come to greet her, and offer assistance, and every one had gone home resolved never to renew an offer so politely, but so coldly declined.

"Martha may get along as best she can," said they; "did any one ever see such haughtiness, and such a dismal face! But one might have expected it, she was always proud, even when she was only a little girl, and when she refused to play with children of her own age."

And while her visitors returned home, discontented and hurt, Martha, never thinking of their grievances, put everything in order in her home, washed floors and windows, hung curtains, stretched carpets, and tried to give back to the old home the comfortable look of its former

days. Everything found its old place: here, her father's armchair; there, the good lamp which had brightened so many watchful nights; on this shelf, the Bible which she could never reach, formerly, without the help of a footstool.

Little by little the old abbey resumed the aspect of those happy days, but the deep voice of the soldier and the child's prattle were gone. The little garden, too, became gay with its beds of salad, and its rows of pinks and asters.

In the poultry yard, cluckings that promised well were not slow in making themselves heard; there, at least, life and animation reigned; with the early dawn, two noisy cocks sounded their war-cry; a little later in the day, the hens took their turn.

At the stable, three pretty goats were domiciled, and there Martha passed the greater part of her day. So, always busy, always at work, she tried to forget, not to think, to keep strong; besides, of what did she have to complain? Had she not all she needed, and more? She was lonely, it is true, but her lot was that of many. And then, did she not know that God was just, and who was she to rebel or murmur?

One day, some months after her return, Martha had a visit from the young pastor and his wife, whom she had never seen since their marriage.

She was at first a little nervous, her lips became white, and her manner embarrassed; but she soon con-

trolled herself, and it was with a pleasant smile that she entertained her guests, and did the honors of her little kingdom to the young bride. She conducted her everywhere; to the flowery orchard, to the stable; not a corner was forgotten; nevertheless, occupied as she was, the day seemed very long; but when, at the moment of departure, the gentle little wife rose on tiptoes to kiss her, Martha felt her eyes moisten, and returned her caress without an effort; then she watched her depart, bright and joyous, on her husband's arm.

Standing in her doorway, her hand shielding her eyes as if to protect them from the sunlight, long since disappeared, Martha could not tear herself from her post.

"For her," thought she, "happiness; — for her, love, an active and useful life; — for her, the privilege of sharing his work, his sorrows, his joys; — for her, the task, sweetest of all, of making him happy; for me, loneliness, solitude, always, always. But who am I to murmur?" Martha entered the house slowly, and shut the door behind her.

The young girl was at first a little astonished at her isolation, then she grew accustomed to it, and had ended by liking it.

Her solitude was broken once or twice a year, when she received the visit of her old friend; that was a tribute of gratitude he owed her, and in which he never failed. He accomplished this duty with the religious

exactitude with which he did everything, sometimes accompanied by his wife, sometimes alone; later, with two or three small boys whom Martha spoiled.

Each spring saw him come with the same fidelity. But, as formerly he had ignored the young girl's fresh beauty, so now he was ignorant also of her sufferings; he never remarked the silver threads in her brown hair, nor the wrinkles which hollowed her forehead, temples, and around her mouth. Martha, to him, was always the same, and the years did their work, unnoticed. To her name had been prefixed aunt, which one receives easily in the village, when one has attained ripe years, and that was Martha's life when the little Roland appeared in her doorway, one beautiful evening, a baby in his arms, and a request in his eyes which her heart could not refuse.

CHAPTER IV.

TWO VISITORS.

"COME in," Aunt Martha responded, to a discreet tap at her door. It opened slowly, and showed a head framed in a white bonnet.

"Come in," she repeated, recognizing the old servant from the cottage, "I am all alone with my baby."

"I came to see it," answered the old woman; "it is not mere curiosity, I assure you. I met the little boy just as he was bringing it to you; it was I who told him to ask you. I was sure that you would be sorry for it. You know well that if my mistress had lived, it would not have been necessary to send him anywhere else."

"Do you think she would have kept it?"

The old woman did not answer, and seemed lost in thought.

"What a strange boy!" continued Aunt Martha. "What made him think of taking it to the cottage when he knew your lady so slightly?"

"You know he lived there some months himself, and then his mother died there, so I have heard."

"It is true," sighed Aunt Martha, "I remember as if it were yesterday; she was so young, almost a child, and so pretty! Roland is her image; but she was already

very ill, poor little thing, and yet she never realized it any more than her husband. They both thought that our climate would cure that bad cough."

"Is he dead, too?" asked the old woman, after a moment's silence.

"I think not, but no one knows anything of him?"

"Then why has he not taken his son?"

"Oh! you know men are like children; they do not want any distraction from their grief, because they think themselves inconsolable. The child worried him, and he left it with Aunt Ursula, promising to come back for it soon. They say he is in America, now."

"Poor little fellow, my mistress had noticed him, and it is not wonderful, such a handsome boy; she loved to see him pass the house, and they had become accustomed to exchange little signals. That is all their acquaintance, but I am not surprised that he thought of carrying her his baby." The old woman checked herself.

"I never saw her," said Aunt Martha; "she hardly ever went out of her garden, and I rarely go in that direction, but I was grieved to hear of her death."

"I saw that she was failing," responded the servant, "and yet I did not expect the end, though she had often spoken of it lately. On the contrary, I was hopeful, she was so brave that I always thought she would get over her sorrow; but she is happy now, and I am the only one to be pitied."

“Have you no family?”

“My family? My family was her husband and herself; I took care of her since her childhood; and I followed her after her marriage, and now I have closed her eyes.”

Aunt Martha said nothing.

“When all is over,” resumed the poor creature, “I shall go back to Switzerland. It is my country, but I hope I shall not stay there long.”

“Do you think of taking another place?” asked Aunt Martha, a little surprised.

“Heaven preserve me from it! I hope God will have pity on me, and soon call me to join my master and mistress; I am not very old, — not yet fifty, but I am tired of life, and should be glad to go.”

“It is sad for you to be alone at such a time,” said Aunt Martha, compassionately. “Do you expect any one for the funeral?”

“No, no one,” responded the old woman, gloomily. “Ah! if you knew what I have seen — but I will say nothing, that must remain with them, and with me. — They are happy, now, they are together, I am the only one to be pitied; but it will not be long” —

Aunt Martha did not hear her, she had raised her head, and was listening. No, she was not mistaken, it was her baby awake. She hurried away, and soon came back, radiant.

“Here she is,” said she, approaching the old woman,

who rose also, and bent over the little face, where shone two clear blue eyes.

“Do you mean to keep her?” asked she, after an instant of silent contemplation.

“Yes, if no one claims her.”

“God bless you! Yes, I know he will bless you,” and slowly, without raising her head, she moved towards the door. “Good-by,” said she; “I will come back again, sometimes, before I go, if you will let me.”

“Certainly, as often as you like. Oh! there is a new visitor. Come in, my boy.” And the old woman drew on one side as a curly head, and two eyes sparkling with pleasure, showed themselves. Then, with a bound, Roland was in the middle of the room.

“You come very late,” said Aunt Martha, passing her hand through the small man’s rebellious locks.

“They would not let me come sooner,” he replied, extending his arms towards the baby which Aunt Martha tenderly pressed to her heart.

She seemed uncertain, then, suddenly remembering that without this small boy she would not have been the happiest mother in the world, she laid the infant in his arms.

“Be careful with it,” said she, “while I go and feed the goats, and shut the poultry-house. I have hardly done anything to-day.”

When she came back, a half hour later, she found Roland sitting on the floor, lost in mute contemplation.

The baby was lying in his lap, and answered his absorbed look, by that profound gravity which characterizes our entrance into life.

The boy, deep in admiration, made for the hundredth time, the review of the soft chestnut hair, the pretty blue eyes, the mobile little mouth; and while studying this tiny face, he passed his hand over those velvet cheeks, wondering if his own had ever been so soft and white.

Aunt Martha watched him, smilingly.

"Well," said she, "what name shall we give to our little girl?"

The boy seemed embarrassed.

"I do not know any pretty one," he answered, "perhaps we could call her after you, Aunt Martha."

She shook her head.

"No, no," said she; "not that. I have always been sorry that I was called Martha."

"Why?" asked the child.

Aunt Martha hesitated.

"Perhaps," said she at last, "because the Saviour preferred Mary."

"Oh, I know!" cried Roland; and, springing up, he began to dance around the room. "I know a name! a name which is very pretty and very true!"

The color had mounted to Aunt Martha's cheeks; she seized the boy, and, with a voice tremulous with emotion, exclaimed, —

"Is it in that way that you take care of Aunt Ursula's children? I shall never dare to trust you with my little girl."

The lad looked at her in surprise.

"That does not hurt them, I assure you! All babies like to be danced."

Aunt Martha smiled, and gently took possession of her treasure.

"Come," said she, "tell me this name which is both pretty and true."

"*Aimée*,"¹ said the little boy. "O Aunt Martha! call her *Aimée*, will you not? It is so true!"

Aunt Martha's eyes moistened.

"Yes," she murmured, "it is true." And, pressing her cheek to that of the unconscious little one, she sent heavenward a mute prayer that the child's name might be true all its life.

Meantime Roland had gone to the window, and looked out.

"Do you want to go?" asked Aunt Martha, but little accustomed to see her visitors remain long with her.

"No," responded the boy; "I should like to do something for you."

"For me?" and the Huguenot's voice betrayed astonishment and almost emotion. Why did this child desire to render her a service, who asked nothing of any one, and whom every one seemed to avoid?

¹ *Aimée* = beloved, much beloved.

"Will you cut me some kindling for to-morrow? The wood is in the woodhouse. The little one is going to sleep. I will light the fire, and, when you come back, the coffee will be ready."

Roland did not wait to be asked a second time, and only came in when she called him.

"I have cut a good heap," said he, and his eyes shone with pleasure.

Aunt Martha seated her little guest in front of her, and had no trouble to put him at his ease.

"Do you hear from your father sometimes?" she asked, when the meal was nearly finished.

A shadow suddenly crossed the child's face, and his eyes grew dim.

"No," he said, "Aunt Ursula has not had a letter for a long time. She thinks that he has forgotten me."

Aunt Martha patted the little boy's shoulder.

"I hope not," said she, and her voice was so gentle that two tears filled the blue eyes raised to hers.

"Where was he when he last wrote?"

"Still in America. He said that he was very busy, and that he would come after me as soon as he could."

"Well, we must believe it," said Aunt Martha, brightly, "and, meantime, be a good boy."

"Can I come again to-morrow?" asked the child, thinking, doubtless, that that was the best answer. Aunt Martha smiled.

"To-morrow," said she, "I must go to the village

with my baby. I have to see some one, and to make some purchases."

Roland had risen to take leave.

"I will come all the same," said he. "I shall look to see if the shutters are closed.

He had started, when he turned back. "The baby is yours, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered Aunt Martha, "if I am permitted to keep it. I am going to the village to-morrow to see about that."

"I hope they will let you, and that I can come to see it every day." And, without waiting for an answer, the curly head finally disappeared.

CHAPTER V.

AIMÉE.

THE child was hers, her's only. All the efforts made to discover its parents were in vain.

"One does not desert an infant to ask for it a fortnight later," grumbled Aunt Ursula, when she learned that the finding of the baby had been advertised in all the papers. "That Huguenot has grown tired of it very quickly. I hope they will not find out anything, and that the little one will be left on her hands."

Her desire was gratified; but doubtless she would have been less proud of her triumph if she had seen Aunt Martha clasp to her heart this child which she had from the first considered as her own, look at it closely, inspect lovingly its delicate features, and give it the sweetest names which had ever risen from her heart to her lips.

So great, so unexpected was her happiness, that she thought of it with her hands clasped, trembling. She, Martha Valrose, had been thought worthy to care for an infant! She had no longer a solitary old age before her; she had now near her one upon whom she could pour out all the affection her heart had so long hoarded, and which no one had ever desired. — It was too

much happiness! She no longer dared to say, "God is just," for who was she to expect such blessings?

But the child, without thought or care for its adopted mother's agitated heart, grew and prospered, learned to know its surroundings, and to love Aunt Martha as if she had been its true mother. Already she greeted her approach by little cries and flutterings of joy; already she had learned to hold out her round arms, and to give an irresistible expression to her pretty eyes; and already the rosy mouth tried to form words to which Aunt Martha and Roland alone had the key.

Time passed quickly for the lonely woman at the abbey, so quickly that she was almost frightened.

"It seems to me that it was yesterday that you brought her to me," said she, one day to Roland, "and, look, she is walking already!"

How that year had flown! While she spoke, she followed with her eyes the tiny little creature who, all trembling, tried to use its own wings.

Roland followed her, step by step, ready to help her in case of awkwardness. But the wilful little one would not even permit him to hold her dress, and uttered a sharp cry every time she saw him approach, or sent him away with an indignant gesture which delighted the spectators.

But it was another thing when she began to chatter, to say real words, to form sentences; how they were astonished then, how they marvelled, no words can tell.

Aimée was five years old, and never was baby at that happy age more tenderly guarded, more fondly loved than the little foundling. Never was baby, with father, mother, and home, happier than the little orphan. Careless of the future, content with the happiness of the present, she would not have exchanged her lot with that of many children whose names and date of birth were duly enrolled in the civil registers.

Aimée knew, all the same, that, on a beautiful autumn afternoon, her friend Roland had found her, a little white daisy in the midst of the tall grass, and had carried her first to Aunt Ursula, who had refused to keep her. At this recital, so many times repeated, the child doubled her little fists, and frowned; then her face lit up suddenly, and her laugh rang out, clear and joyous, as she heard again how Aunt Martha had taken her in her arms, and refused to give her up. But here Roland never forgot to repeat to the child that she was his, as well as Aunt Martha's, and, in his quality of proprietor, he thought it a duty to satisfy all her caprices, and it was no small thing, for the little one was supplied with what would have sufficed for a dozen children.

But how could one refuse a request from those blue eyes, lifted so pleadingly? How say 'no' to those rosy lips, so ready to give their payment."

Not Aunt Martha, who so prided herself on her firmness with the child, who never realized that the tiny

creature controlled the abbey and its inmates, Aunt Martha first of all.

But who dreamed of complaining? What is sweeter than to obey — to sacrifice one's self for one whom we love? Besides, the child had no serious fault. Who of us has not been wilful, obstinate, angry? Who of us has not lifted the hand against the one who has nursed and cared for us, and then condoned all faults by a prompt repentance and tearful caresses.

How could Aunt Martha resist, any more than another, the little arms which clasped her neck, nor the sweet voice which promised better things for the future. Besides, Aimée possessed, in her adopted mother's eyes, the first of all qualities; she was true, true by nature, but true also as a child who feels instinctively that all her faults are pardoned in advance, and that nothing is gained by hiding them.

Aunt Martha watched her child's development, silent and delighted, and at each new discovery renewed her mute thanksgivings.

It was worth while to live, now, to beautify the abbey, to plant new trees in the orchard behind the courtyard. The child adored animals, and already the number of hens had been doubled, and a little lamb had taken its place in the stable, besides the goats. She loved flowers; — the beds in the garden grew larger. She liked walks; they took long ones, on the beach, in the forest, in the village, everywhere it pleased her to go. She loved cats;

Aunt Martha detested them, nevertheless, one fine day, a jet-black kitten made its triumphant entrance into the abbey.

To Aunt Martha's love for solitude, Miss Aimée soon opposed a pronounced taste for society. In spite of herself, it was necessary to follow her into all the houses in the village, to stop with all the passers-by, and to permit her to greet all the little barefooted children by the roadside.

And Aunt Martha found a smile for all those who welcomed her little girl; from one place to another, they began to know her, and to appreciate her. It even happened that, after Aunt Martha had knit a petticoat for Aimée, she knit a second one with the rest of the wool, and they carried it together to the happy recipient; and it was the same with stockings, flannels, and many other things. Soon the words came naturally to Aunt Martha's lips, — 'Come to the abbey when you need anything;' and they came and never regretted it, and each one soon knew that under her grave and haughty exterior the Huguenot hid a generous heart.

CHAPTER VI.

REMINISCENCES.

THE day was closing. Aunt Martha's clasped hands rested motionless in her lap. She had raised her head from her work, and had watched the rosy clouds which floated brightly in the azure sky. The day had been gray and rainy ; but, towards evening, a light breeze had sprung up, and little by little had scattered the sombre clouds, leaving only the delicate gilded ones which continued to disperse, some in vagabond troops, some solitary, according to their individual caprices.

Aunt Martha had grown old, her beautiful brown hair, now gray, was imprisoned under a pretty white cap, which framed her face, and gave to her somewhat severe features, an air of unaccustomed gentleness.

Aunt Martha was dreaming.

Her life, like the day which was closing, had also been gray and rainy. But what a glorious sunset ! Twelve years of happiness, — happiness almost without alloy. Twelve happy years during which she had learned the power, the goodness, the love of God. Twelve years, during which she had seen prosper almost uninterruptedly, the delicate plant confided to her care.

Yes, Aunt Martha could only thank God; the little white-robed creature brought by Roland was now a beautiful little girl, whom she could hear at this moment singing in the adjoining room.

And Aunt Martha once more reviewed in her heart the first years of the child's life; again, she saw her grow and develop, take her first steps, prattle her first words, spell her first syllables; then, suddenly, a terrible memory oppressed her heart. It was an evening when Aunt Martha learned that a cruel fever had broken out among the village children. She felt herself lost, believed herself already deprived of her treasure, who was waiting for her in the doorway, all rosy and smiling.

During many days the funeral bell had not ceased its mournful tolling, and at each sound Aunt Martha clasped her hands, and lifted her heart towards the Consoler of the afflicted, towards the God of pity.

At last the epidemic diminished, and Aunt Martha was beginning to breathe again, when, one morning, a hoarse little voice murmured, "Aunt Martha, I am sick," a distressed little face was lifted towards her's, and the child pressed her throat with her tiny hand.

Aunt Martha understood.

During several days Aimée was between life and death, and those days were never forgotten by her adopted mother; she heard again the moans of the little sufferer, she saw the anxious look which seemed to ask

why she suffered, those pleading eyes which implored relief which she was powerless to give. Then the moans had ceased, the beautiful eyes were closed, a strange pallor had covered the child's brow. Aunt Martha, kneeling by the little bed, her face hidden, murmured low, "Not my will, but thine, O Lord. Thou hast lent her to me, she is Thine." Aunt Martha was conquered, her heart, though broken, was submissive. And the angel of death had passed by, his wings did not touch the sick child. Aimée, her little Aimée, was given back to her. Slowly life came back to her eyes, smiles to her lips, and health to her limbs.

Oh! what a moment! what joy! what gayety! Either Roland or herself always carried the little invalid into the garden, amused her, sacrificed themselves for her. And the days flew, carrying with them the last moment of uneasiness. Aunt Martha looked at her recovered treasure no longer, as she had so often done, anxiously, uneasily, but calmly and gratefully; she had learned to take her happiness no longer with trembling, but with thanksgiving.

Roland, the faithful friend, who came regularly at the close of every day, was certainly not the least happy of the three.—What pleasant moments, what happy Sunday afternoons they had passed together! She seemed to hear him now, mingling his falsetto with her voice when she tried to teach the child the old Huguenot hymns.

A rather sad smile lit up her face.

Those were happy moments which could never return, for Roland was now far away, on the other side of the sea. She seemed to see him now, open the door half way, showing his curly head, then, with a bound, spring into the room crying breathlessly: "Aunt Martha, Aunt Martha, my father has come!" And in his joy he had taken the little Aimée on his back, and danced around the room.

"Your father, my boy? I am very glad."

"Oh! Aunt Martha, he is so handsome, and so good; he has given Aunt Ursula so much money, and now she is as gentle as a dove."

Aunt Martha had smiled.

"And has he come back to establish himself here in France?"

"No, he came to find me. We are to start at once. And just think, Aunt Martha, he is married again, and I have little brothers and sisters who only speak English, and who will not understand a word I say to them! Isn't it funny?"

"So you are going to leave us, my boy?"

Roland had stopped short, he had not thought of that. His bright face sobered, he threw his arms around Aunt Martha's neck, and burst into tears. Aunt Martha wept also, and Aimée looked at them, a child's wondering look.

Roland had gone. Aunt Martha had kissed his forehead, and placed a book in his hand.

"It is a Bible," she had said, "read it, my boy. It will keep you from harm."

The poor child had not answered except by a sign of assent; then he had taken little Aimée in his arms, had kissed her, and quitted the abbey without a word.

Some weeks later, a thick letter with an American stamp told them of Roland's arrival in his new home. And during many months, he was for the abbey's inmates, as faithful a correspondent as he had been a friend.

But Aunt Martha, who never forgot his name in her prayers, had not shown herself so zealous in her replies, and the correspondence languished, and, after one or two years, ceased entirely.

"It is not wonderful," thought Aunt Martha, who, all the same, felt herself a little guilty, "Roland cannot pass his life in writing, any more than I; he is now a big boy of fourteen or fifteen, busy with his studies, the profession of his choice." No, no, she was not angry with him; she was sure it was not forgetfulness. Did she not know by experience that one can love one's friends, remain faithful to them, and nevertheless, never find time to write to them, and she was ready to cite herself as an instance to any one who would have dared to contradict her.

Besides, Aimée was nearly seven years old, there was no time to spare; they played school in earnest, but a school for two, where it was permitted to kiss each other between each lesson,

Aunt Martha had fished her old school books from their depths, where they had slept for more than thirty years, and set herself to review her grammar in order to explain it to her little pupil; then showed her the names of countries on an old map, all yellow and faded with age. As for history, there was no need of a book, for Aunt Martha had the history of France at her fingers' ends. But when they came to arithmetic, she stopped short after the four rules, and declared that was all that was necessary to go through life without embarrassment. They did not even go into fractions, for she had always found it easier to add or subtract halves and quarters in her head than upon paper.

Aimée, like all intelligent children, did not much like work, and loved holidays; but that did not prevent her from making progress, which delighted her teacher, and soon embarrassed her.

What would she do when the little girl had gone beyond her? "And that will come soon enough," thought Aunt Martha, that evening as she watched the light clouds which had gradually lost their brilliant colors, and disappeared behind the mountains. What would she do? Put Aimée in a boarding-school? Send her away? Never! She would rather go to school with her than part with her.

She was in the midst of these reflections when the door opened, and a graceful child, not too large, nor too thin, but slender and agile, sprang towards her chair,

and, without ceremony, flung away the work which lay on Aunt Martha's lap, and established herself in its place.

"Oh! how nice it is here," and she nestled like a little bird who tries to make his nest still more comfortable.

"Aunt Martha, what a quantity of preserves! I thought I should never finish covering them."

For all answer, Aunt Martha kissed the lazy little girl's forehead.

"Aimée, I think that soon, in a year, perhaps" —

"A year! but that is not soon."

Aunt Martha smiled.

"Let me speak; child, I thought that in a year's time, I should be obliged to send you to a boarding-school."

"A boarding-school? What for?" And two eyes, gray rather than blue, bordered with long lashes, were fixed in surprise upon the face bent over her's.

"I want you to learn many things that I cannot teach you, and that is the only way."

The mass of blonde hair was quickly shaken by a decided movement of the little head.

"Do you not want to know many things, and to be able to speak several languages?"

"To speak with whom? With you, Aunt Martha?"

"No, unfortunately, for I only know French."

"Then, I do not know what good it will do me; I cannot talk to myself, alone."

"But you could read, Aimée, that would be very nice;

besides, I have always regretted that I did not know many things."

"No, I do not want to go to a boarding-school, I want to stay here at the abbey, and speak French, nothing but French."

Aunt Martha said nothing, but remained thoughtful. If her means permitted, she would establish herself at Arles, rent a few rooms, and so keep her child near her. Her income, though very small, might, perhaps, suffice for such an expense. One of these days she would write to Monsieur Arnould, to explain her project, and, in one or two years, when the time had come to give Aimée superior instruction, they would leave the abbey together, and return together. A sigh of relief rose to her lips.

"Now, Aimée, get down; I must go to prepare supper."

"I will get down, if you promise not to send me to a boarding-school."

"I promise you one thing, my little girl, and that is, not to part with you, if I can help it."

For all answer, two arms surrounded her neck passionately, and the embrace lasted so long that Aunt Martha was released crimson and half-choked.

CHAPTER VII.

A PAINFUL DISCUSSION.

THE problem was solved, so thought Aunt Martha; and, with a light step, she went about her numerous duties.

As for Aimée, no shadow of care or apprehension had ever touched her heart. They continued to live, as in the past, a happy life, full of activity, rich in tenderness, and devotion. The child never asked herself if she was happy in her lot, the idea never came to her that it could be different; Aunt Martha was sufficient for her happiness, and the abbey with its garden, orchard, and stable was a kingdom where she reigned sovereign, and where no one thought of disputing her authority.

She it was who cared for the gardens, who every day went to the poultry-yard to look for fresh eggs, whom the feathered tribe greeted with joyous flutterings and concerts, more expressive than harmonious; — she it was who climbed the fruit trees, and like a bird suspended herself to the branches, while her agile fingers robbed them of their wealth; — she it was who went, afterwards, from house to house, to carry the “surplus” of these harvests, a surplus which Aunt Martha never found too abundant; — she it was, who, during the winter evenings,

read to Aunt Martha, chattered after her fashion, forming a thousand delicious plans for the future, to which Aunt Martha listened in silence, as she mended the piles of stockings which the child's small feet knew how to wear out so quickly.

So rolled away two years, two happy years, all sunshine and joy.

The winter was gone. Already the spring breathed gently upon the orchard trees, which, obedient to her call, clothed themselves noiselessly in their white robes, while the daisies and dandelions started up at their feet.

"Aunt Martha, there is Monsieur Arnould. I saw him at the foot of the path." But the young girl's voice, announcing this, did not express joyful surprise, and her bent brows betrayed fear rather than pleasure.

"Monsieur Arnould," repeated Aunt Martha, "I expected a letter from him, not a visit, certainly. Show him into the salon, Aimée, and ask him to wait for me a minute."

Some seconds later, the visitor was shown into the salon, which was rarely occupied, and summer and winter had a cold, stiff, and deserted look.

"I am ready," said Aunt Martha, taking off her white apron; "but, Aimée, instead of waiting for me here, you ought to have remained with Monsieur Arnould. It would have been more polite."

The little girl contented herself with an expressive grimace.

"Well," continued Aunt Martha, "since you do not like to stay in the room, you can prepare us some coffee."

So saying, she quickly disappeared.

"I did not expect a visit from you," said she, after having welcomed her friend; "I will light a fire at once, it is always a little cool in this room." And, suiting the action to the word, Aunt Martha soon had a bright fire, which made the room cheerful; then she drew up an armchair and installed the pastor therein.

"You did not expect me, Martha," said he, at last. "I am not surprised at that, but I thought it best to answer your letter in person."

He cleared his throat.

"I wish," continued he, "to speak to you in all frankness, as, indeed, I have always done."

Aunt Martha looked at the fire, without answering.

"You know, Martha, that I was the first one to encourage you to keep Aimée, and to rejoice in what seemed your happiness. But, to-day I do not in the least approve of your projects. What is the good of giving that child a superior education? Why place her thus above you, above those with whom she is destined to live?"

"I thought," responded Aunt Martha, without raising her eyes from the fire, "that it was my duty to give her the same education which she would have received from her own family."

"There again, I should have objections to raise. First of all, who tells you that the child has ever belonged to a family of good position? But, admitting that it is so, is it reasonable to educate her for a position which she will never fill? why give her tastes that she cannot satisfy, and which will certainly render her discontented with her lot?"

"I am not afraid of that," said Aunt Martha, quietly; "education spoils only foolish people, or those who have too little of it to know wherein they are lacking. Your objections would be just if applied to a person of a different disposition."

"That is just your error, Martha," interrupted the pastor. "From what I have seen, Aimée has great need of learning humility. She is too wilful, too capricious, too proud for her position."

"You do not know her well enough to judge her," responded Aunt Martha, always with the same tranquillity.

"It is not necessary to have much acquaintance, to see that she does what she pleases with you."

Aunt Martha smiled.

"If I had listened to her, I should never have written to you, and there would be no question of leaving the abbey."

"In this case, you are more than ever wrong, and if I were you, instead of sending her to school, I would teach her to direct a household, to wash the linen, to occupy

herself with the garden; not to plant flowers only, but to cultivate it generally."

"Do you think that Aimée looks strong enough to use the tools necessary for a garden?" interrupted Aunt Martha, her face slightly flushed; "look at her hands, her waist, her figure generally, and tell me if you think her made for the work of which you speak."

"That is exactly what ought not to be; if you had accustomed that child to work, she would now be a strong young girl, capable of making herself useful, and of sharing your labors."

"I doubt whether that would have changed her constitution. Besides, while household duties are not to her taste, Aimée does willingly all that I ask her."

"Then why send her to a boarding-school?"

"Because I believe that I should do my duty by her."

"I fear that you are blinding yourself, and that you will regret it later. Aimée, as I just told you, needs above all to learn modesty, a branch that is not taught in boarding-schools. I do not like to see her so noisy, so gay; in a word, with so little realization of her position."

Aunt Martha's cheeks had grown crimson, her heart beat so vehemently that she was forced to put her hand to her side.

The pastor continued, — "I feared, as indeed it turns out, that I should not succeed in dissuading you, but I have done my duty, and that is the essential thing. Let

us speak now of your project of establishing yourself at Arles. My wife has already been busy trying to find you rooms, but, up to the present time, all her search has been in vain. The price is far beyond what you can pay ; this new establishment will force you to sell the abbey."

Aunt Martha's face darkened.

"I see only one way to avoid it," pursued the minister, "and it is to speak of that, that I came ; I hope thus to prove my desire to be useful to you, and to do good to your adopted daughter.

"If you consent," pursued he, "to separate yourself from Aimée, my wife will take charge of her, willingly, and will care for her as if she was her own child. She shall attend, as you desire, one of our best schools, and I, on my side, will do all in my power for her education."

"No, no, not that," interrupted Aunt Martha, who, in her agitation, laid her hand on Monsieur Arnould's arm. "No, not that ; you are very good, both of you. I do not know how to thank you, but if I part with Aimée, I prefer to put her in a boarding-school."

"May I know the reason of your refusal ?"

Aunt Martha had risen.

"I beg of you, do not think me ungrateful ; I know you are very good, I thank you, but I cannot accept."

She checked herself for a moment. "I think," she continued, "that you have never understood Aimée's

character, and I fear you could not get along; and then, there is another reason." She hesitated, and blushed a little. "Though Aimée is still so young, only fourteen, the years pass quickly, and you have sons, whom she will see every day."

"Fear nothing, Martha," interrupted the pastor, smiling. "Thank God, our sons know their duty too well to form any light attachment; they would never cause us such a grief."

"Do you imagine that I have thought of them?" cried Aunt Martha, "no, I thought only of my child. I have been young myself, I have suffered, and I wished to spare her." She seated herself again, and hid her face in her hands. How could she have dreamed of it? How, in her blind tenderness, had she been able to forget that her child had not the right to love? Oh! the cruel world which condemns to solitude an innocent being, because no one knows the father's and mother's name!

"Martha, I never saw you so unreasonable. What have I said that could have grieved you thus?"

She rose, and tried to smile.

"You must need something; the coffee has been ready long ago." And, without waiting his answer, she preceded her guest into the dining-room.

Some moments later, they walked together the path leading to the high road.

"I thank you for troubling yourself for me," said

Aunt Martha, as they approached the little inn at which the pastor always stopped.

“I have done it very willingly,” he answered; “you know that I am always glad to be useful to you. Write me when you decide.”

“Thank you. I wish to think about it a little more.” She held out her hand to him, and they separated.

CHAPTER VIII.

AUNT MARTHA'S SICKNESS.

AUNT Martha slowly took the abbey path, her head bent, absorbed in sad thoughts. She felt neither the dampness, nor the penetrating chill of that spring evening. Her heart revolted against the world's injustice, against man's egotism. Nature itself seemed cold and stern. All at once a merry cry caused her to raise her head; Aimée, followed by the three goats, was running to meet her.

"I thought that he would never go! Oh, Aunt Martha, what a good thing that he does not come often."

"What an escort!" said Aunt Martha, gently patting the pretty heads, which so unceremoniously presented their horny foreheads.

"He has made you cry!" exclaimed the young girl, remarking the red eyes of her adopted mother. "Oh, Aunt Martha, I hate him."

"Aimée, it is wrong to speak so."

"But it is true; if I said otherwise, I should tell a falsehood, and that would be worse still; I hate all the people who hurt you, and I would like to kill them," she cried, vehemently.

"Aimée, you grieve me greatly."

The child threw herself on Aunt Martha's neck.

"I will never give you the least pain, but I cannot love those who make you cry. Do you like him much, Aunt Martha?"

"I liked him very much, formerly, and I have great confidence in him, still."

Aimée made a face.

"Shall we see much of him at Arles?"

"Nothing is decided yet, my darling; this change will cost me more than I thought."

"Then we will stay here, that is all."

Aunt Martha sighed, and both continued their walk in silence.

"You are cold," cried the little girl, suddenly; "I have seen you shiver twice; let us run, Aunt Martha, that will be such fun."

"No, no, Minette,* I cannot run any more, I am too old; I shall warm myself with some coffee."

But with all the good will in the world, Aunt Martha could only carry her cup to her lips; she remained thoughtful, her head leaning on her hand.

"It is not nice of you to eat so little when I took such pains to prepare supper," said Aimée.

"I have a little pain here," and Aunt Martha put her hand to her side; "I think I have taken cold, the air is still very damp, and the room seemed so cold."

"And you did not put on a shawl to go out!"

* *Minette* = Kitten, pussy. A term of endearment.

"That is nothing, I will go to bed early, and to-morrow I shall not even remember it."

"No, Aunt Martha, you shall not go out any more this evening," cried the young girl, seeing her rise and move towards the door; "I can very well look after the goats, and shut the poultry-house."

Aunt Martha did not insist, and began to clear the table; but that work, simple as it was, took a long time; at every quick movement the pain in her side increased. She had soon to leave her work, and seat herself in her armchair.

"It is singular," thought she; "I am certainly not sick, I have never been so." A shiver shook her from head to foot. "I have taken cold, that is all. When Aimée comes back, I will ask her to make me some tea."

But the remedy did not produce the desired effect, and Aunt Martha, shivering more and more, went to her bedroom, repeating again that it was only a cold. She wished to reassure the young girl, forgetting that those who know nothing of danger, never dream of it.

When the little housekeeper had put everything in order, she looked around her with a satisfied glance, then took her candle, and went towards the bedroom, the door of which she opened noiselessly.

"Is it you, Roland?" asked Aunt Martha.

At those strange words Aimée stopped short. Aunt Martha was sitting up in bed, her eyes wide open.

"Come in," she continued, "the little one is sleeping, she will not wake."

"It is I, Aunt Martha; it is I, Aimée!"

"Ah! it is you, my little girl."

"Aunt Martha, don't you know me?"

"Why, yes, my darling; have I said anything? I have been dreaming, doubtless," and she sank back on her pillow, and closed her eyes.

Aimée remained motionless by the bed, her heart oppressed with a vague fear.

"I am sure of it," murmured Aunt Martha; "that paper makes it certain. 'Have pity.' That means forever; do you not think so, Roland? Take care, don't run so fast; there, she is crying now; give her to me, you are a bad boy, Roland."

Aunt Martha opened her eyes again.

"I have only been dreaming," she murmured; "I thought that you were crying, Aimée — I am thirsty."

The child ran after some water, which the sick one drank eagerly.

"I do not know what is the matter with me," she resumed, "I sleep so badly. You ought to go to bed, Aimée."

"If I only could take off that stone he put here, and which hinders me from breathing. Do not go away, child, I want you; between us two, perhaps we can lift it. It is very heavy, that was why I could not run; he did

it from a sense of duty, he does everything so. — Will you not help me ? ”

For all answer, the little girl clasped Aunt Martha's neck, convulsively, and began to sob.

“There, there, my darling, why do you give way like that ? Do not press me so, I cannot breathe. Yes, that is it, put your cheek against mine ; how cool it is, I am burning, am I not ? Give me your hands, they are so tiny, so soft, not at all made for hard work.”

And Aunt Martha laughed, and went on talking, sometimes in a low and unintelligible voice, sometimes louder, opening her eyes suddenly, as if she woke from a dream, into which she dropped immediately, mixing her memories of the past with her present cares, her dreams of the past with those of the future.

When the first gleam of daylight penetrated into the room, it fell upon little Aimée, kneeling by Aunt Martha's bed, her head bent upon the coverlid, and sound asleep. The sick woman opened her eyes, and her look fell first upon the child, kneeling near her, then upon the untouched bed at the other end of the room.

She sat up to collect her thoughts. What a strange night, she never remembered to have passed one like it ; all her body seemed bruised, and she had a keen pain in her side, which increased at every breath.

And why was not Aimée in her own bed ? If only she could remember ; but no, her head was too heavy, she must lie down again, and try to sleep.

Her movement woke the child, who opened her eyes. They met those of the sick woman.

"Are you better, Aunt Martha?"

"Not yet, my darling, but I shall be as soon as I have slept. Are you sure that you have not taken cold?" she added, uneasily; "you ought not to have stayed by me."

Her voice was weak and broken.

"What must I do, Aunt Martha?"

"Light the fire, little one; you must warm yourself."

"Shall I bring you your breakfast?"

"No, not now, I am too tired."

The child quitted the room, silently, and Aunt Martha closed her eyes, in hopes of sleeping a little; but the weight which oppressed her, and which seemed to increase every moment, hindered all repose; anguish seized her. Was she going to be ill? No, it was not possible. She had not the time. But what did this pain mean, this feeling of heat and cold? Why this pain in her side, this difficult respiration? She was ill, there was no doubt of that; all illusion was impossible, and yet, she could not believe it, the idea had never come to her that she, like so many others, could lie on a sick bed. It was for her dear one that she had always feared suffering and death, never for herself. She had never thought that her time would come; her surprise was so great, so complete, that she could not believe it. She, ill? She die? But what would become of her child,

her child who had no one but her in the world. Who would care for her, love her, caress her ?

No, it was not true ; she would not, she could not leave her yet : her heart, for the first time, revolted. She had been able to bow her head, and renounce her girlhood's hopes, she had been able to give up her dying infant and accept her lonely lot, had the sacrifice been required ; but to desert her post now, to leave in strange hands this delicate plant with its tender heart and its need of affection. Oh ! She could not, she would not !

Aunt Martha moaned and clasped her hands, but no peace came to her poor heart, no voice came to murmur consolation to her soul.

“ Is it you, Aimée ? ”

The door had opened gently.

“ I cannot sleep,” murmured Aunt Martha.

The child sat down on the foot of the bed, rested her head against the bedpost, and remained motionless. The hours passed away, and only the short, hard breathing of the sick woman broke the monotonous silence. Aimée had closed her eyes, those pretty eyes, yesterday all sparkling with happiness ; and, but for the slight trembling of her lips, one would have thought her asleep. Aunt Martha also remained quiet, but she was not asleep either ; her face turned away, her eyes wide open, her hands painfully clasped, she fought in her heart, the most painful, the most terrible of battles. When she moved, after a long time, she had conquered, she had

drunk the bitter cup clear to the dregs, and, as formerly, she could say, "Thy will, Lord; Thy will, only."

She wiped her damp brows, and called the child to her.

"What have you been doing all this time, Aimée?"

"I have been staying with you, Aunt Martha; have you slept?"

"No, my child," and the sick woman gently passed her hand over the little face which bent forward to kiss her.

"Listen, Aimée," she resumed, after an instant. "I do not like you to be alone; go after Aunt Rose, she will not refuse to spend the night with us; go, my little girl."

Aimée obeyed, and soon came back, followed by a little old woman, with a wide-awake, smiling face.

"Well, Martha," said she, taking the hand which the sick woman held out to her, "what is the matter? What have you done to put yourself in such a state?"

"I took cold, yesterday, in our large room; it is always a little damp there at this season. I sent for you, Aunt Rose, because I was worried about my little girl, who has already spent the night by my bedside."

"Well, well, do not distress yourself. She shall sleep in her bed, to-night. What have you eaten, to-day?"

"Nothing; I have no appetite."

"Are you thirsty?"

"Oh, yes."

"What are you drinking?"

"Water."

"But do you want to kill yourself? You ought to have hot drinks. I will go and prepare one which will make you sleep."

Aunt Martha smiled wearily, and the little old woman left the room, soon to reappear with a cup of tea, which she gave to the invalid, then turned towards the child.

"You must eat something," said she; "you are as white as the bed-curtains." And, as Aimée did not answer, she took her hand, and led her to the kitchen.

"You must eat," she repeated; "without that, you will not be able to nurse Aunt Martha."

This last argument was convincing.

"Now, it is the goats' turn; I will wager that you have forgotten them. What a housekeeper! Come, you are not yet able to get along alone. The good God will remember it." And with that, Aunt Rose went out to repair the little girl's numerous omissions.

When she reëntered the sick woman's room, she answered the child's warning gesture, with a smile of satisfaction.

"Well, well, she is sleeping; it is a good sign," said she, in a whisper; "my tea is worth all the doctors in the world; I hope we can do without any of them here."

"Now, I am going to prepare all that I need for to-night, and, as you have nothing more to do, I advise you to go to bed, for you look more dead than alive."

“But I have not said good-night to Aunt Martha.”

“That will not matter for once. Her sleep will do her more good than kisses.”

With these words, the little old woman vanished, to come back much later, with a big pot of the marvellous tea.

Aimée was sleeping already, a profound slumber, and the noise of her calm and regular respiration was mingled with the sick woman's rapid and broken breathing.

CHAPTER IX.

NEW ARRANGEMENTS.

AUNT MARTHA was better; that is to say, out of danger. Already she began to sit up, her cheeks to flush with the color of health, and her eyes to recover their gentle light. Strength returned, slowly it is true, but it returned, nevertheless.

From her armchair, where she passed long hours, Aunt Martha watched her active little girl, who came and went under the direction of Aunt Rose.

She had decided now, more than ever decided, to separate herself from her child; she wished while she could, to do for her all that seemed a duty. Aimée would learn thus to use her own wings. It would be good for her, good for both of them, and, while it still brought tears to her eyes, the thought had lost its thorn. Besides, she no longer had a choice, it was necessary to send Aimée to school, or deprive her of instruction, since her income, more than modest, would not permit her to accompany her; but she knew, and that thought was her best consolation, that her child would be kept by that Almighty Friend into whose hands she daily committed her. "He will be for her what He has been for me, always, always faithful;" so thought Aunt Martha.

"Aimée, when you have finished your work, come to me, we will talk."

"I have finished, Aunt Martha." And without losing time, the young girl drew up a little footstool.

"There," said she, seating herself, "I shall do nicely here, but what a pity that you cannot take me on your lap, Aunt Martha; I remember how delightful it was."

The invalid smiled, and caressed the pretty head pressed lovingly against her knee.

"Aimée, do you remember our project of going together to Arles?"

"Yes, Aunt Martha, but I know that you cannot afford it, and it is all the same to me."

"It is true; I could not go with you without selling the abbey, and I think it would be wrong to do that."

"Certainly it would."

"But, Aimée," Aunt Martha's voice trembled a little, "I want you to go to school."

"Without you, Aunt Martha?" Two pleading eyes were lifted to hers.

"Without me, my darling, since it must be."

"Oh! Aunt Martha, you promised me,"—and tears cut short the words.

"Aimée, listen to me! Do not cry so; you hurt me. Aimée, you are old enough to understand me."

The sobs were checked, but the little girl's face was still hidden in Aunt Martha's lap.

"Aimée, do you not know that education is the best of

riches, — the only one really enviable; if I listen to you to-day, and keep you at home with me, I am sure that one day you will regret it; perhaps you will reproach me.”

The child did not answer.

“You know, my darling, the sacrifice is as great for me as for you,” pursued Aunt Martha, “and that if I give you up, it is because I am sure that I am doing my duty. You have not much liking for household duties, less still for out-door work. The day will come, very soon, when you will not find so much pleasure in climbing trees, and running about with the goats. You will be glad then to have a higher interest along with your material duties.”

There was a moment of silence.

“When I was of your age, I was very fond of everything about the house and garden, and yet I remember how I regretted leaving school; but my mother’s death and my old father’s loneliness made it necessary. Often since then, I have wished for a better education, and to-day, more than ever, since it necessitates our separation.”

Aunt Martha said no more, and a little cheek, all wet with tears, was pressed against hers.

“Aunt Martha, I do not believe I can live away from you.”

“Do not say that, my darling. Think of the happiness of meeting again; and then, time passes quickly when one is busy, and you will have plenty to do, much lost time to make up. Besides, I have no intention of

parting with you for years, you will come home for the holidays."

"But, Aunt Martha, you are still so weak, if you were to be sick again," and the sobs began again.

"Be calm, pussy, I will not send you away until I am quite well. I want first to go to Arles myself. I want to see everything with my own eyes before I take you."

Aunt Martha kept her word. As soon as she was strong enough, she hired a *char*,* and set off, leaving the young girl in the care of Aunt Rose, who asked nothing better than to prolong her stay at the abbey.

"There is nothing like work to drive away the blues. Come, little one, we will shake the carpets and wash the curtains, that Aunt Martha may find everything fresh and nice when she comes back."

Aimée left the window from which she had watched the *char*, carrying away her adopted mother, and unwillingly obeyed the little old woman who tried to inculcate such excellent principles; but her head ached, she would have preferred a good cry to the proposed work.

"See here, daughter, it is good to make one's self useful. Tears do no good, except to make the eyes and nose red, — that is all."

* *Char*, a conveyance, somewhat like a wagon, used in France and Switzerland.

"But then, why are they there, if they only do harm?" The old woman reflected a moment.

"Perhaps to punish young girls for their vanity." Aimée began to laugh.

"No," said she; "Aunt Martha told me of a lady who became crazy after a great sorrow, because she could not cry."

"That is possible, but that only proves that I am right, and that one ought to keep tears for great troubles, which always come soon enough."

And while they talked, they dusted and brushed, put everything upside down, just for the pleasure of rearranging everything as before.

So passed three busy days, during which Aimée did not find a moment to allow herself the luxury of tears.

And when the abbey had resumed its everyday appearance, when all was shining with cleanliness, when fresh curtains had been hung in the windows, and great bouquets filled the vases on tables and mantels, then Aunt Rose looked around, satisfied.

"Well," said she, "have we not done good work? don't you think Aunt Martha will be better pleased than if we had spent these three days crying? See here, little one, when you care for people, ask yourself, first of all, what will please them; that is the best way to make yourself useful, and spare your tears for your old age."

But Aunt Rose's eloquence was lost. Aimée had

heard the noise of wheels, and had flown away, leaving the little old woman to finish alone, which gave her almost the same pleasure.

Some minutes later, Aunt Martha entered her home, a little pale and tired, but looking happy.

"I will tell you all about it later," said she to the child, who clung to her, and would not let her go. "Now I want some of Aunt Rose's coffee, I am as hungry as a wolf."

Those were happy days which followed Aunt Martha's return, and yet many tears were mingled with their smiles and caresses.

Was not the moment just at hand when they could no longer talk together, nor show their love for each other? There was much to do; also, much to think about, to sew, to prepare.

Aunt Martha had recovered all her former activity, and with it, her serene gayety. She it was who encouraged the young girl, consoled her in her sad moments, and spoke to her of the Heavenly Friend who would keep them both, and bring them together again;—she it was, who, without a thought of pain or fatigue, found bright words, made a thousand plans for the home-comings, and finally persuaded herself that the grief of parting would be less, after all, than the joy of the return.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS.

AUNT MARTHA had faithfully, valiantly, accomplished her task to the very end.

The child was at school, she had conducted her there herself; she had seen her in the midst of her comrades and playmates; she had aided her in preparing her school dress; had placed her wardrobe in its bureau, the wardrobe prepared so lovingly; she had given her a Bible, as formerly she had given one to Roland, charging her to read it every day; then she had given her her last kiss, her last caress, and had returned alone, her heart empty, but happy in having done her duty.

And now Aunt Martha was again in the old abbey, where the light step of the young girl was no longer heard, where her fresh voice no longer woke the echoes in the old corridors. No little hand now came to slip itself into hers, no smiling mouth held itself up to give or receive a kiss.

Aunt Martha felt all this, and yet she was happy. The days, it is true, seemed long to her; but nevertheless, they rolled away, and each of them in its flight brought the holidays, the home-coming, nearer.

Faithful to her old habits, she went out but little, and

made no visits; but, in spite of that, many came to see her, and were always made welcome. Aunt Rose had become a frequent visitor at the old abbey, and came often to spend the evening.

"This Martha," she thought, "always knows how to talk without speaking ill of her neighbors. That is why it is so good to be with her." And that was why she and many others found themselves so often at the old homestead.

To depart content with one's self and every one else, is not exactly the usual impression after a visit; but it was always the agreeable reflection one carried away after a visit to Aunt Martha.

So the days and weeks passed; the autumn had gone, winter had taken its place; the sky was not so cloudless, but in the heart of the lonely woman the sun still shone.

Christmas was drawing near; Christmas would give her back her child,—that child of whom she rightly felt herself the mother,—that child whose progress rejoiced her from week to week. She would see her again, spend a fortnight with her, a fortnight which it seemed to her would never end. What a reward after such a hard separation! Would she be changed,—prettier, taller? At that age, eight months sometimes transforms a young girl; and soon, in a few years, she would be her daily companion, her adviser, her friend. Did she not see already how she developed in her letters? Even now,

there was no longer the childish nonsense, reflection came little by little; intelligence, mind, and heart, all were ripening. And Aunt Martha's tearful eyes were raised heavenwards, seeking beyond the clouds the presence of the One who had given her such a precious gift.

"Do you not hear wheels, Aunt Rose?"

The little old woman raised her head from her knitting, and listened.

"No, I hear nothing; but that is not saying much."

"It is already night, I hope she will not be cold; I am sorry I did not go after her myself."

"To go to bed when you got back! a nice holiday you would have given her!"

For all answer Aunt Martha put her finger to her lips, then, rising quickly, hurried to the door.

"Take a shawl, Martha," cried Aunt Rose; "you will catch your death."

But Aunt Martha heard nothing more; she had crossed her little garden, and had just time enough to open the gate before she clasped in her arms her child, no longer a child; but a young girl, really, as tall as herself, and whom she kissed without being obliged to bend her head.

The little old woman had followed to get the baggage, and had taken refuge in the kitchen.

"I must look at you," said Aunt Martha, raising the lamp-shade; "how you have grown, Aimée!" And her

radiant look rested tenderly upon the rather pale face, which met the examination without the least embarrassment. It was the same white, pure brow; the same abundant brown hair, the sunny reflection of which she had so often admired; the same eyes, full of light and shade, according to the long lashes which rose and fell; only the mouth had changed somewhat, and did not seem so ready to smile.

"Your cheeks are a little thin," said Aunt Martha, at last, caressing them gently. "You have been working too hard, pussy; you must rest."

"That is nothing, Aunt Martha, I am so, so glad to be at home again; I wish I could stay here always."

"And your studies, your music, and your companions?"

Aimée did not answer.

Aunt Martha clasped her in her arms again.

"Now, come to supper," said she; "Aunt Rose has already come twice to the door."

"Is she still staying at the abbey?"

"No; but it is the same thing; she comes to see me every day. Without her the time would have seemed much longer."

"You ought to ask her to take her little room again, Aunt Martha; I am sure that she would ask no better than to give up that frightful hut."

"I have already thought of that; but it is a decision one cannot make impulsively."

The supper passed gayly, and was prolonged far into the night. They had so many things to tell each other that the hours slipped away unperceived. Is it not always so in moments of happiness?

The old clock, slowly striking its twelve deep-toned strokes recalled Aunt Martha to her senses.

"Midnight! it is not possible! At my age to be guilty of such folly, it is unpardonable. But it is for once; to-morrow we will be wiser, will we not, Aimée?"

A long and tender kiss, which left the lonely woman moved and dreamy, was the young girl's only answer.

"She is the same," thought Aunt Martha, some days later. "Always the same, and yet there is a difference; but what?" And that was what she had not been able to discover. "Her city life has done her no harm; she has not become vain nor proud, and she has lost none of that ease which made every one love her. Thank God! I have not given her that awkwardness and coldness by which I always kept people at a distance. She is doubtless tired; perhaps she has worked too hard.—But, no, it is not that; it must be something else which gives her pretty mouth a bitter expression, and darkens her beautiful eyes. She must have something which pains her, but what?"

Aunt Martha was puzzled. It was necessary to have patience, the confidence would certainly come; and, meantime, she clasped her hands, and left with God her

child, the subject of her preoccupations. One afternoon, when she was absorbed in her thoughts, the young girl's quick, light step came to interrupt them unceremoniously.

"Back already, Aimée? You have not made many visits."

"O Aunt Martha, how naughty that is! Formerly you found the time so long when I was away, I was sure that you wanted me. Now, I am well punished for my presumption."

Aunt Martha smiled.

"You ought to go out every day, Aimée; it gives you such a pretty color."

"Go out!" The young girl began to laugh, and seated herself on the arm of Aunt Martha's chair. "We went out every day at Arles; we took long walks, two and two, always keeping step, without looking right or left. We went out every day, no matter what the weather was, always at the same hour; just to regulate or establish the circulation of the blood, Madam Robert said."

"You do not seem to appreciate that reason, which I find very good, nevertheless."

"What a pity that what is good is generally so tiresome."

Aunt Martha took the young girl's hand and caressed it.

"Are you discontented, Aimée? I thought you were reconciled to boarding-school life."

"That depends on what you mean, Aunt Martha. I like Madam Robert, and nearly all my lessons."

"Which ones do you dislike?"

"Mathematics, to begin with; they are my horror. Sometimes I think that I have understood, but the lesson after, I have to begin again."

"That is my fault," said Aunt Martha, laughing. "I have given you my antipathy without knowing it. What other lesson do you dislike?"

"I don't remember just now."

"And the languages?"

Aimée laughed gayly.

"Oh, Aunt Martha, I am always in a fog with my German. I shall never learn to speak it. I may as well give it up. I believe there is a natural aversion to some languages, as well as to some people."

"And English?"

"Ah! there is a practical language; one article for the two genders, no plural for the adjectives, several suppressed tenses. There is only one difficulty,—that is the pronunciation; but when once I have learned to twist my mouth sufficiently, that will go of itself."

"Is that the study you prefer?"

"No; I like history and literature better."

"Are your companions more advanced than you?"

"Some of them."

"Are they nice? Have you any favorites?"

"I do not like any of them."

"Why, my darling?"

And Aunt Martha looked uneasily upon the young face, suddenly become crimson, and which turned itself away to hide its blushes.

"You cannot be happy with such feelings. Do you not know that they offend God?"

"Yes, I know it; but I cannot help it. Oh, Aunt Martha, let us talk of something else!"

Aunt Martha did not answer, and Aimée remained silent, her head leaning on her aunt's shoulder.

"Does your head ache, Aimée? That is the second time you have put your hand to your forehead."

"A little; it happens sometimes."

"Well, let us go and prepare supper. I am sure you are hungry. At your age, headaches are often caused by that."

And they both moved towards the kitchen.

"You have hardly eaten anything," said Aunt Martha, when the meal was nearly ended; "perhaps you will do well to go to bed."

"But I want to help you with the dishes."

"No, not this evening; go to bed, pussy. Your eyes are already half shut. I will come soon."

Aimée obeyed, and Aunt Martha remained alone, her heart a little heavy. Then when she had finished her work, she went noiselessly to the bedroom, where all was dark and quiet.

"That is nothing," said she, closing the door gently;

"some jealousy or quarrel. It often happens to young girls. They have pained her in some way; Aimée will certainly tell me about it one of these days." And, happy in that thought, Aunt Martha took her book and knitting.

The hands of the great clock indicated ten o'clock when she decided to seek her couch. She blew out her candle, and opened the door carefully.

All was quiet in the little room; the soft moonlight penetrated the shutters, and its silver rays fell upon the floor, and upon the little white bed where the young girl lay.

Aunt Martha approached on tiptoe and bent to listen to her breathing.

"Aimée, my darling, you are not asleep; you are crying? What is it my child, tell me?"

Two arms clasped her neck.

"Oh! Aunt Martha, Aunt Martha, is it wrong to be a foundling?"

Aunt Martha started.

"Wrong!" murmured she; "who has put such an idea into your head?"

Aimée sat up, pushed back her hair, and remained motionless, her eyes intent, her hands clasped.

"You do not answer me, darling?"

"Aunt Martha, why am I a foundling?"

"I do not know. Is it that which makes you unhappy, Aimée?"

“Oh! yes; oh! yes; formerly I never thought of it; now I think of it always; often in the night it hinders me from sleeping.”

“What has happened, my child, tell me all.”

“How could I know? you never told me to hide it, Aunt Martha, and I have told it, and now I know” —

“What do you know, Aimée?”

The poor child hid her face in her hands.

“I know that—I have no mother, no family, no name.”

Aunt Martha pressed her hand to her heart, and bent her forehead upon the edge of the bed.

“Who told you that, Aimée?”

“I heard it; they were speaking of it among themselves, and I understood it. When one has no family and no name, one is not like others. Oh! Aunt Martha, I am so sad; I do not understand; does a mother desert her child because she does not love it?”

There was a moment of silence.

“Aimée,” said Aunt Martha, at last, “I am as ignorant as you upon all which concerns you, but I have always thought that if your mother had lived, I should never have known you. Will you not try to be happy in spite of all, my darling, and to love me a little still?”

Aunt Martha’s voice broke in a sob.

“Do not say such things, Aunt Martha, I did not want to tell you for fear of grieving you; I am happy

with you. I could not have loved a true mother more than I love you. Aunt Martha, do not cry so; I am glad to be your child, after all; it is the same thing for me if I do not know my name, and when I come back, we will never think of it any more, never."

"I ought to have thought of it," murmured Aunt Martha, caressing the little head which leaned against her. "I ought to have warned you that there are people in the world who only esteem you by your birth, and the name you bear; but I never believed, I never thought that young girls, almost children" —

"No, Aunt Martha, it is nothing. We will not talk of it any more."

"Let me speak, little one; there was a time when the thought that you might be unhappy alarmed me, and now, God knows that if I could, I would spare you any grief, no matter what I suffered; but I have learned that it is best to let God do as He will; and I can say to him now for you, as well as for myself, 'Thy will be done.' Will you not try to say it also, Aimée? Remember that He is your best friend. I should be so happy if I knew that you had taken Him for your guide and helper."

"I will try, Aunt Martha."

"And now, go to sleep. Good-night, my darling."

"Good-night, Aunt Martha."

But instead of letting her go, she kept her hand in her's, and drew her face down to say, —

“Aunt Martha, I will not be sad any more, I will not regret anything, for if it were otherwise I should not be your child.”

Aunt Martha answered these words with a kiss, and went to her bed, where she long lay awake, lost in thought.

CHAPTER XI.

DEATH OF AUNT MARTHA.

THE holidays had passed; the bird had taken its flight, and Aunt Martha, by her lonely hearth, followed it with her prayers, and committed it to the care of the All-Powerful.

She was no longer ignorant of what had pained her child; she had seen her tears, she had heard her bitter complaint against the world's injustice and cruelty, and, more than once, she had been upon the point of siding with the young girl; but she had been sustained by that faithful hand which had always guided her steps, and which would certainly lead her even to the end.

Thus with a tranquil heart, and a look heavenward, she had opened her arms to let her bird escape once more. And the winter had passed, the spring had come again, already the orchard trees had laid aside their white robes to array themselves in their summer green, the insects sang in the new grass, the flies buzzed in the sunshine; everywhere joyous sounds and the fluttering of wings responded to nature's awakening.

But at Arles, in Madam Robert's great schoolroom, no one would have known of the arrival of the springtime.

The sun, it is true, darted its warm beams everywhere, but the closed shutters prevented their indiscreet entrance.

Seated around a great table, all stained with ink-blots, a dozen young girls seemed plunged in a calculation of the greatest importance. They never raised their heads, and their eyes were never lifted higher than the level of their inkstands, into which they frequently plunged their pens, in order to return to their copy-books which they covered with figures.

All their lips moved, but no sounds came forth. The professor, his back to the blackboard which he had covered with demonstrations, waited patiently the result of his labors, never thinking that his best coat suffered considerably from the aforesaid contact. Little by little, the pens stopped, and the eyes, so long lowered, were raised with a sigh of relief.

"You are not yet ready, Miss Valrose?"

A graceful head, covered with rather disorderly locks, was raised at this question.

"Not yet, sir."

"Pass me your copy-book."

It made the tour of the table slowly, and arrived at last at the professor.

"There, always the same thing. You have not understood the problem from the very beginning. Come to the board, and we will do it together."

The young girl obeyed.

"Let us see;" said the professor, "with what shall we begin?"

"At the beginning, sir, if you please."

All the pupils burst out laughing.

"Silence, young ladies, or I will give you tasks. See," he added, turning to the board, "the first of our operations consists in — Silence, young ladies, there is nothing to laugh at."

But he was mistaken; the white back of a coat supposed to be black is more than sufficient to upset a class of mischievous schoolgirls.

"Arithmetic," resumed the professor, "is a science for which we have a disposition, more or less, from our very birth, but experience shows us that it is difficult to acquire. Miss Valrose, I told you that the first of our operations was" —

The door opened, and a pale and weary face appeared.

"Aimée."

The young girl turned, and without further ceremony flung down the chalk which she held, and ran towards the new comer.

"My child," said the lady, shutting the door, "Mr. Arnould is here. I have had him shown into my room, where he is waiting for you."

Aimée would have sprung away, but the lady detained her gently.

"I believe," said she, "that he has some news of Miss Valrose. She is not very well, but" —

Aimée did not stop to listen, and the lady was still speaking when the door of the room opened and shut quickly.

At the noise made by the young girl's entrance, Mr. Arnould turned and came to meet her, but with so grave a look that, instead of advancing, she stood motionless upon the threshold.

"Monsieur Arnould, Aunt Martha" —

The pastor took the young girl's hand.

"Aunt Martha is sick," said he, "and desires to see you. Madam Robert will allow you to leave at once. I will come after you."

The poor child's pale lips moved.

"I have just learned it through this telegram."

Aimée pressed her hand to her forehead, breathing with an effort, and trying vainly to speak.

"Do not alarm yourself beyond measure," continued Mr. Arnould, "Aunt Martha is alone; it is very natural that she should have begged the doctor to send for you to nurse her."

"Aunt Rose lives with her," murmured Aimée. "Oh! Aunt Martha!" and her delicate hands were clasped in a passion of pain and anguish.

At this instant, the door opened, and Madam Robert entered.

"My poor child, my poor dear little girl," she murmured, embracing and bathing with tears the icy little face, which looked at her uncomprehendingly. "I have

just prepared your valise. Come, my child, you must change your dress."

Aimée allowed herself to be led away, and, some moments later, she was seated at Mr. Arnould's side in the little carriage which had so gayly carried her away a few months before.

"Courage, my child," said Madam Robert, "perhaps things will not be as bad as you think. Mr. Arnould, you will see that she does not catch cold; it is so easy to do so in a carriage at night."

The pastor bowed.

"Adieu, Aimée; adieu, my child."

A look answered her, — what a look! The good little lady buried her face in her handkerchief, and the carriage disappeared.

The journey was made in silence; the night came, the pastor, faithful to his promise, put a shawl around her, and advised her to sleep.

It was late when the carriage stopped at the abbey door with two tired and stiff travellers. A little old woman appeared on the threshold, lantern in hand.

Aimée sprang from the carriage, and moved towards her.

"Aunt Rose, how is she?"

"Good heavens, how you look! One would think you were a ghost. Come in, quickly."

Aimée did not speak.

"She expects you," continued the little old woman,

addressing the travellers; "it has seemed a long time to wait," she added, looking towards Aimée, who leaned against the door, and tried vainly to control the trembling which shook her from head to foot.

"You had better sit down, Miss Aimée; you do not look as if you could stand."

"What does the doctor say?" interrupted Mr. Arnould.

"Nothing at all, but he has left some medicine."

"How long has she been sick?"

"Only three days; she took cold in working in the garden. You know, Martha always thought she could work as before. She ought to have remembered her last year's illness; but no, she wanted the garden to be bright for Miss Aimée's return, and, at her age, that was unreasonable."

The young girl had covered her face with her hands.

"Does she suffer much?" continued the pastor.

"A little, from oppression, though she does not cough; but after every attack, she becomes weaker. Now, you will come in, will you not?" And she preceded the travellers into Aunt Martha's room.

Aimée went in first upon tiptoes, approached the bed, and bent over a face, white as the pillow upon which it rested.

"I expected you," murmured Aunt Martha, "I knew that I should see you again. You have come also," said she, perceiving the pastor, "you are too good, thank you!"

"How are you, Martha? I hope you will be better soon."

Aunt Martha smiled, a beautiful smile that lit up her pale face.

"Yes," said she, "I shall be better, up there. Do not cry, Aimée, that hurts me. Sit down near me, and give me your hand. I had so many things to tell you, to tell you both, but I have no more strength."

At the end of a moment Aunt Rose entered.

"Your supper is ready, come," said she, turning towards the young girl; "you must eat something."

Aimée shook her head.

"I cannot; leave me." And Aunt Rose was forced to retire, followed by but one of the travellers.

"Aimée," murmured the sick woman.

A caress was the only answer.

"I should have wished to stay a little longer on your account, my darling, but I will not murmur; I know that my Friend, my Heavenly Friend will keep you. We shall meet again soon. The years pass so quickly. Aimée, you have been my best joy on earth. When you are sad, think of that; say to yourself: 'without me, Aunt Martha would have lived and died all alone.' Are you not glad to have been my consolation, my happiness?"

"Oh! Aunt Martha, what shall I do without you?"

"Do not say that, you will see how good He is. You will see, now that you need Him, how He will aid you,

how He will console you. I know that he will guide you, that he will grant my prayers, all my prayers."

At this moment, the door opened and the pastor entered. Aunt Martha turned towards him her beautiful eyes, now somewhat dimmed.

"I confide her to you; you will love her a little, she will have only your wife and yourself — tell her for me to caress her sometimes" —

"Dear Martha, you can depend upon us."

"My will is written, and placed in my bureau drawer"

"Martha," said the pastor, after a moment of silence, "if you have any doubt, any fear, I will help you willingly."

The sick woman closed her eyes and clasped her hands.

"All is light," murmured she, "all is peace and joy, and — confidence."

"Have you no fear of the coming judgment?"

Aunt Martha turned a bright face towards the pastor.

"The judgment!" repeated she, "Oh! no, no fear. 'Come, ye blessed of my Father,' — is that a fearful judgment?"

The pastor was silent.

Hours passed. From time to time Aunt Martha opened her eyes, fixed them upon the child kneeling near her, and closed them, murmuring words of tenderness and peace.

It was daybreak when the face of the sick one became convulsed with an expression of intense pain;

she raised herself quickly, held out her hands, and moved them convulsively.

"It is an attack," said Aunt Rose in a whisper, advancing to sustain her. "Open the windows. There, there, Martha, you are better."

But the sick woman struggled vainly for breath, her eyes seemed starting from their sockets, and her blue lips were frightfully contracted. All at once, her head fell upon Aunt Rose's shoulder, her arms remained inert at her sides, and she lay motionless.

"It is over," murmured the sick woman.

Aunt Martha tried to smile and reach out for the hand that she had let go.

"Are you better, Martha," asked the pastor, approaching.

The sick woman did not answer.

"There he is," cried she, and her eyes, wide open, saw already the wonders of the infinite. "I am going — Aimée, you will come, too."

A passionate cry which Aunt Martha never heard answered these words.

The little old woman bent over the young girl.

"Courage, my child. Mr. Arnould, will you help me to carry her to bed, I think she is too weak to walk. There, poor lamb, that is always a moment of respite, it is almost hard to call her back to life just to suffer."

While speaking Aunt Rose rubbed the young girl's

hands and temples vigorously. Aimée opened her eyes, looked around her, and turned away her head.

"She will sleep now," said Aunt Rose, "it is the best thing that she can do; and she gently quitted the room, followed by the pastor.

As soon as she was alone, Aimée left her bed, and tremblingly went towards that of Aunt Martha. She knelt near her, and contemplated long that gentle, calm face over which so many storms, so many trials, so many sufferings, had passed, but where only one thing remained now, the perfect peace which God gives to his pardoned ones.

"Aunt Martha," said she, at last, "Aunt Martha, take me with you. I cannot live all alone." She took tenderly the hand which was growing chill, and pressed her cheek to the cold cheek on the pillow. "Aunt Martha, I am your child, only yours; do not leave me alone. I only love you, Aunt Martha."

"Oh! Aunt Martha" — a sob rose with the name — "my name is not true any more; it never will be true."

And in her despair, the poor child flung herself down, and gave way to a passion of grief.

"There, there, how perfectly unreasonable you are," said Aunt Rose, half opening the door; "I thought that you were asleep, you have given me a fine fright; come to the kitchen, I have prepared something for you to drink."

Aimée began a refusal,

"If Aunt Martha saw you, she would be greatly grieved."

"I wish that I could die."

"We must live before we can die; when you are good and holy like Aunt Martha, it will be time to go."

"I wish I could die now; I cannot live without Aunt Martha."

"Hush! if she heard you, how sorry she would be. Come and warm yourself; you are half frozen. Aunt Martha would be so uneasy if she knew it."

Aimée rose and followed Aunt Rose to the kitchen. She allowed herself to be placed near the fire, drank what they gave her, and remained silent, her face hidden in her hands.

The next day Mr. Arnould called her to him. He was seated at Aunt Martha's desk, reading a paper.

"It is her will," said he, "and here is what I found afterwards."

Aimée held out her hand to receive a little package, carefully wrapped, and containing the chemise which she wore when Roland had found her, also the paper upon which was written that simple prayer which Aunt Martha had answered with all the love and tenderness of her heart.

The poor child's eyes filled with tears, but she tried to remain calm.

"Aunt Martha," continued Mr. Arnould, "leaves you all that she had; the abbey is yours, as well as her little

fortune, which, as you know already, is most modest; she begs me to continue to look after it, as during the past, and to watch over you as a guardian. We will leave in a few days; you to return to Mme. Robert; I, to resume my work."

"And Aunt Rose?"

"She will take care of the abbey until you are of age; such was Aunt Martha's desire. Later, in a few years, you can arrange with her, send her away or keep her with you, as you please."

Aimée rose to go.

"Wait, I have something to tell you. You know that a guardian has not only the charge of his ward's possessions, but that he ought to watch over her character, aid her with his advice, and even correct her when he sees best; in a word, that it is his duty to replace the father and mother."

Aimée looked closely at the grave and cold face of him who would replace her adopted mother, and a bitter pain filled her heart.

"I hope," continued Mr. Arnould, "that you will always feel that I am acting for your good, and in order to accomplish my duty faithfully."

He held out his hand, in which the young girl placed the tips of her fingers; then she went out precipitately to return near the one who could no more dry her tears, or soften her pain, or calm, by word or look, the passionate sorrow of her soul.

A week had rolled away. A little mound, where no grass as yet grew, some dried flowers, and half-faded wreaths, marked the place where Aunt Martha slept.

At the abbey, in the old home she had left, all was silent. Aunt Rose, always active, came and went noiselessly; in the rooms occupied only yesterday, dusted, took down curtains, covered the furniture, then closed the blinds, keeping for her own use the little kitchen, and the adjoining room, where she had passed so many happy hours, and where Aunt Martha's shadow still seemed to move.

Aimée was gone, without having seen the garden, without having visited the stable or poultry-house. Alone, in Aunt Martha's room, kneeling by her bed, her head buried in the bedclothes, she had waited until they came after her to join Mr. Arnould, to take her place at his side in the little carriage which would conduct her back to school.

Far from opposing any resistance, her tears were dried; she had made only a last gesture of adieu to Aunt Rose, who, standing in the doorway, silently waved her handkerchief, and all had disappeared,—the little old woman, the abbey with its yellow blinds, the garden, the orchard,—only one thing was left, the loneliness of one who had lost all, all which made life good, easy, and happy.

CHAPTER XII.

SORROWING.

AIMÉE had resumed her place in the study-rooms, Nothing was changed, and except for the austere simplicity of her black dress, no one would have remembered her short absence. Neither would any one have suspected the frightful loneliness in her heart; diligent in her duties, always ready to work, no one would have thought that her nights were often sleepless, that her sorrow kept her eyes from closing.

There are in the world two sorts of people; those who support grief, and those who cannot. During the first moments, both pay the common tribute of tears and desolation. But reason aids, sometimes, also the necessity for work, the instability or natural egotism of the human heart; and these are the first, not healed, but capable of supporting the battle of life: as for the others, they go and come during the day, take up their occupations, but their bitter sorrow never abandons them for an instant; then, instead of finding forgetfulness during the hours of the night, they improve that time to nourish their sorrow, to accuse themselves of faults often imaginary, to call back sweet and bitter memories; in a word, to give way to regrets until suf-

fering alters their reason, or obliges them to lift their hands heavenward, and cry for mercy.

That was what Aimée did, and the burden, too heavy for her weak shoulders, was lightened. Little by little, calm came into her soul, she began to tread the same path which Aunt Martha had so bravely followed. But she was still far from being like her adopted mother! What wrong thoughts in her heart, what desires for vengeance, what bitterness that she never thought of repressing until it was too late, and all that remained for her was to acknowledge another defeat.

Mr. Arnould, faithful to his duty, came frequently to visit his ward, and perceived with great satisfaction, that she was no longer the gay and joyous child of former days; it was no longer necessary to call her to order, or to put her in her place, her young face had really lost that air of careless happiness which had so often shocked him. But a shade came to mingle with his joy. As the years passed, a singular transformation showed itself in the young girl; it was an evil for which he knew no remedy, and for which he was almost ready to blame nature itself, nay, even to think an error of Providence. What! his ward, the orphan destined to go through life humble and unperceived, seemed to wish to rival her companions in grace and freshness.

In vain the faithful guardian scrutinized her toilette, and her deportment; he was obliged to recognize that her dress was as simple as he could desire, even simpler

than that of his wife, though it gave *her* no such charm; and, strangest of all, Aimée never seemed to know that her complexion was a pearly white, uncommon enough; her nose perfect; her teeth dazzling; and her eyes with their long lashes, of a rare beauty. Only her mouth for a long time had no smiles, but a somewhat grave expression, which kept at a distance the gay girls in the midst of whom her life passed.

The good guardian sighed in thinking of the temptations, the difficulties of all sorts which the poor child was sure to encounter before she had reached an age when the heart has no more aspirations, when it knows no more illusions, when it only desires one thing — rest.

Mme. Robert also accomplished in her way the duty which she had laid on herself towards the orphan; but, for a long time, she had received in return for her demonstration of affection, only a vague and sorrowful smile. Nevertheless, little by little, confidence came, then a real friendship was established between the pupil and her teacher. And, as those who love sincerely are not slow to show it, Aimée became soon her companion, her indefatigable aid, seconding her with all her power, sharing her cares, her fatigue, sparing her as much as she could the thousand annoyances of a boarding-school life.

It was thus that four years rolled away, four years of activity and labor, during which Aimée had valiantly

trod the narrow path — though stony and often bordered with thorns, from which the child of God cannot wander, where his feet are often wounded, his hands torn; where he falls sometimes, fatigued and discouraged, but where he is never alone; where, after each wound, he feels a compassionate Hand lift and soothe him; where he hears, after each fit of discouragement, a tender, and mysterious voice murmuring words of divine comfort.

And so the road continues, and, strangest of all, as one climbs higher, it becomes smoother, and easier. As for Aimée, her path had not yet lost the stones or ruts; but, notwithstanding all, she advanced bravely, struggling to conquer her faults, even fighting the impetuosity of her character, and never uttering a complaint except to Him who pities our faintest sighs.

Her joyous and expansive nature had been for a long time somewhat changed; the wound given formerly in her childish days kept her instinctively away from the noisy life around her. She lived thus, somewhat solitary, from day to day, with only one desire, — to relieve from all pain the friend whom she daily saw sinking under the weight of sickness and lassitude.

At last, there came a day, when Mme. Robert was forced to admit it, and recognize that she was at the end of her forces, that her task was finished, and that rest was needed.

She could no longer hesitate, it was necessary to say adieu to all her old habits of work, to all the young girls

she had so learned to love; it was necessary to leave, and it wrung her heart to do it, the orphan whom she had taught to love her, and who would, henceforth, find life doubly lonely.

One evening, when she was plunged in these sad thoughts, the door opened gently.

“Madame, you sent for me?”

“Yes, my child.”

The door closed again, and Aimée approached the arm-chair where the invalid sat.

“Must I bring a lamp? The darkness is so gloomy?”

“It is not necessary. Sit down near me. Aimée, I have had a visit from the doctor!”

“I know it; does he think you worse?”

In saying these words, the poor child’s anxious look sought to pierce the obscurity, and read her answer upon the pale face which she could hardly see.

“No, not exactly, but he says I must give up all occupation, and leave town as soon as possible.”

There was a moment of silence.

“I have a sister,” resumed the invalid, “who lives in Switzerland; I shall live with her. She has begged me to come, long ago, but I could not decide” — she checked herself.

“Aimée, why do you not say anything?”

“I do not know, I thought” —

“What did you think?”

“That I would like to go with you. Oh! dear

madame, take me with you. I would nurse you so well."

The lady gently patted the young girl's face.

"I wish I could," she said, in a low tone. "I wish it with all my heart, but I see no possibility; my sister and her children will want to nurse me, you know."

Aimée made a sign of assent.

"Why must I be always parted from those I love," she murmured, at last. "What shall I do, now? No one needs me any more. I was so happy to help you, to be useful to you."

Madame Robert did not answer; she feared her own weakness.

Aimée remained silent, her head leaning against her friend's knee.

"You must not lose courage, my child; you know who sends us this trial."

The pretty head made a gesture of discouragement.

"Do you think?" — her voice trembled, "do you think that Mr. Arnould will let me go back to the abbey?"

"I fear that he would think you still too young, but he has never told me any of his plans."

"Too young! Then what will he do with me? Where will he send me? It is only to disappoint me that he will not let me go back to the abbey, only because I told him one day it was what I most wanted. Oh! I cannot help it, I detest" —

"Hush, hush, child, in another moment you will regret

your words. Hitherto, Mr. Arnould has shown himself an attentive and devoted guardian. I am sure he will do nothing but what he believes to be his duty."

"But why is his duty always what I detest the most?"

"You have such different natures; you are all impulse, and he all reason. You do not understand each other, that is why you have so little sympathy. Now, my little girl, I must ask you to preside at dinner; send me a lamp, I shall go to bed early, I am very tired."

Aimée rose.

"Can I come back after dinner?"

The invalid smiled.

"Yes," said she, "come as often as you will."

Some weeks had passed, and every one knew that the mistress of the house was very ill, and was going away immediately, even before all the young girls committed to her care had time to depart, even before the lot of her favorite had been settled.

It was in the midst of all the disorder and come-and-go occasioned by all these departures, that Mr. Arnould arrived on a beautiful afternoon, to pay a visit to his ward.

The latter was not slow to join him in the deserted parlor, which alone, in the midst of universal disorder, kept an appearance of a little comfort.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur," said Amy, entering,

"I think I have kept you waiting; the servants do not know what they are doing; one of the young girls told me that you were here."

Mr. Arnould seated himself, and invited Aimée to do the same.

"I have received an answer," said he.

The blood rushed to the young girl's cheeks.

"A favorable answer. The family is composed of a young lady, her father, and three aunts."

Aimée sighed.

"The conditions are very simple; they only exact that you should always speak French with the young girl, that you should read with her something instructive and interesting, that you should accompany her in her walks, in a word, that you should be an agreeable companion for her."

"I should have preferred to teach little children."

"One cannot always have one's preferences, besides, we are happy wherever we do our duty. I should certainly have liked it better if you had taken a nurse's or a sister's career; but, since of your own confession, you feel for that holy task only disgust and aversion, I desire that you should accept the offer which has been made you, because I believe it to be advantageous for you. Monsieur Wallson lives in the country, which is equivalent to being far from the temptations and corruptions of great cities. He is a widower, which explains the presence of the three aunts."

“Must I go soon?”

“Next week. You will fix the day, and I will write to announce it. The journey is not long; St. Rambert is only six or seven hours by the railroad.”

There was a moment of silence, which the pastor broke, finally.

“I do not know,” said he, a little embarrassed, “if you understand why I have taken so much pains to seek a family who live in the country, and in absolute quiet.”

“No, sir,” and her long lashes were lifted inquiringly. Mr. Arnould turned away, as if her clear look disconcerted him.

“It has been my wish,” said he, “in thus acting to shield you from temptation, humiliations, and possibly from sorrows of the heart.”

Aimée remained motionless.

“The Wallson family,” pursued the pastor, “have only been in France a short time, and, besides, being in mourning, live in complete seclusion. You will not there be exposed, as might have happened otherwise, to meet any society,—any young men, above all; for”—here Mr. Arnould cleared his throat, “you ought to know it, in our day there do not exist young men romantic enough to love a young girl for herself only; they want a name, a family, a fortune.”

Aimée had understood; her crimson face showed it sufficiently.

“I am persuaded,” continued Mr. Arnould, “that you

will know one day, if you do not know it now, that I have acted from a sense of duty, and for your good. I know that Aunt Martha would have approved, and that thought is infinitely precious to me, and ought to be so to you."

Aimée did not answer.

"Mr. Wallson," added the pastor, rising, "knows all the circumstances relative to your birth; but he has not thought it necessary to inform his family; perhaps he has feared objections on the part of the three ladies; in short, he knows all that concerns you."

Aimée did not answer, she held out her hand to her guardian with an absent manner, and accompanied him to the door; then she flew up the stairway to her room, and shut herself in.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN EVENTFUL JOURNEY.

“ADIEU, my child, may God bless you!” With these words Mr. Arnould pressed his ward’s hand, assured himself that her little valise and portmanteau were in safety in the net above her head, and went out of the carriage at the moment when the train started.

Aimée leaned against the car window, made a gesture of adieu, and drew back.

Why should she linger? She had no friends to watch her, and to wave their handkerchiefs.

She looked around her absently. An old gentleman opposite to her had already installed himself comfortably for a nap; a little farther, a mother tried to quiet three or four small children who all wanted to be at the same place at once. Aimée turned away to look outside, but all was gray: the sky, the olive fields, stretching as far as eye could reach, the earth, — even her poor heart, which felt itself more desolate, more lonely than ever.

What should she do in this place where she was going, this unknown place among strangers to whom she had nothing to draw her; who would doubtless see in her only a machine ready to distract and amuse their stupid little girl.

This thought swelled her heart with indignation. No, Aunt Martha would never have approved of this project; she would never have sent her alone among strangers, at least, not without first assuring herself that she would be happy there; but her happiness was the last thought of Mr. Arnould. Never since Aunt Martha's death had she felt so lonely, so sad. Her heart seemed to her a desert, where all was arid and dead.

Why had her guardian not permitted her to go to live at the abbey? What difference could one year more or less make? O! how long it was to wait until she was free, and could return to the only place she loved! There, at least, she felt nearer Aunt Martha; it seemed to her that there her shadow, like a good genius, would accompany her, direct her, console her.

But perhaps that was only an illusion; perhaps there too, the frightful gap of her absence would make itself felt, more, perhaps, there, than anywhere else. No matter, she had decided to return there and die there; she wished to be buried at Aunt Martha's side, it was there only that she could be happy, *there* no more care, no more pain, no more Mr. Arnould! Yes, she hoped that that moment would come soon; God would not let her grow old all alone in the world; he knew that she could not live alone and desolate.

At twenty, when one is in perfect health, the thought of death is sweet, and has nothing alarming. To wish

earnestly for death belongs more or less to the most beautiful time of life; later, when the affections, when habits have become chains binding us to earth, the heart naturally demands a respite, which is never sufficiently prolonged.

For Aimée, to die was to leave a desert land, it was to rejoin Aunt Martha in a land of happiness, so her desire had nothing astonishing or exaggerated.

The hours passed without many changes. Some travellers had left, and had been replaced by others. She began to feel tired of her position; if only she could sleep; she tried to lean her head upon the back of her seat, took off her hat, and sat motionless, though persuaded that her efforts would be useless.

When she opened her eyes there had been made, all unknown to her, a complete change in the car; the mother and children had disappeared, and in their place was a good old lady, who, imitating her example, slept the sleep of the just; while opposite to her was a little young man, who appeared greatly to enjoy her confusion. She hastily replaced her hat and drew out her watch; no, it was not possible, she had just shut her eyes for a moment, she carried it to her ear.

"Do you wish to know what time it is?" asked her *vis-à-vis*.

"If you please," she murmured.

"It is a quarter to four. Has your sleep made you miss your station?"

She answered with a negative movement of her head, and turned away to look outside.

“What a profile !” murmured the traveller, evidently with the intention of being heard ; — “a true statue, not a flaw.”

Aimée felt as if she should fly ; her pulses beat violently, she dared not turn her head for fear of meeting the bold look and smile which she felt were fixed upon her.

At this moment the whistle sounded, and the train slackened. There was a movement in the car ; the old lady had waked, and was hastily gathering up her effects, like one who had been upon the point of forgetting herself.

Motionless in her corner, Aimée watched her depart, and a strong desire to follow her took possession of her. But how to do it ? Had she yet the time to take down her valise and portmanteau ? Should she call a porter ? But what could she say, how could she explain her fright ; and, after all, was she not, perhaps, absurd and ridiculous ? And while she reflected, the whistle cut short her hesitation. She ventured then an uneasy look around upon the object of her uneasiness, and met an insolent smile.

The poor child felt herself taken like a bird in a net, without any means of escape. She called all her courage and coolness to her aid, and opened a book, in which she could not distinguish a line. The train was just

starting, when, at the instant, cries were heard: "Too late, too late; no one can pass!" The young man put his head out of the window, and began to laugh noisily:

"Oh! that is well done! So much the worse for laggards. He can stay on the platform. Good-night!"

Attracted by the noise, Aimée bent forward, just at the moment when the belated traveller, without caring for the injunctions which pursued him, sprang upon the steps, and, the instant after, entered the car, his air as calm and quiet as if he had been waiting at the station a half hour.

The new comer glanced at the two travellers and smiled.

"I am an interloper," thought he; "there is some one who wishes me at the ends of the earth! What a furious look. I am very sorry, but he will have to bear it, though I will do my best not to be too much in the way." And drawing from his pocket an immense newspaper, he lifted it between himself and those whom he took for a young couple, provoked at his tempestuous entrance.

Her heart filled with immense joy, Aimée returned to her reading; she would have liked to clasp her hands, and say as Aunt Martha before her: "Who am I that thou shouldest care for me!" But her fears were not entirely dissipated. The young man had immediately seen the new-comer's error, and had resolved to profit by it. He bent familiarly towards the young girl, and

murmured some words to which she did not answer. But though she took care to keep her eyes fixed upon her book, she could not keep from blushing, and was annoyed at the nonsense of which she could not always understand the words, though pronounced nearly in her ear.

The position was becoming unendurable; the young man's insolent familiarity increased from minute to minute. The poor child's hands were clasped nervously. What right had he to treat her thus? What had she done to draw upon herself this outrage? Did he not see that she was alone and defenceless? How much longer would he continue this odious pleasantry?

And while she thought thus, the train slackened, the stranger, who, up to this moment, had been motionless, folded his paper.

"He is going," thought Aimée, and in her agony, she closed her eyes.

A hand was laid upon hers.

The moment after, as by an electric shock, she found herself standing in the middle of the car, her face pale as death, her hands joined, her look fixed upon the stranger, who, without waiting an explanation, sprang from his seat, and threw himself upon her persecutor.

"What do you mean?" sneered the latter, "have you lost your wits?"

"Coward! Wretch!" responded the other, shaking him violently, and pushing him towards the door.

"Ah! mind your own business."

"That is just what I am doing."

"Let me go."

"Not before you are on the pavement."

"Ah! do you think" — and he began to struggle with all the rage which a consciousness of weakness gives. But the stranger, larger, stronger, and calmer, held him as if in a vise.

"Get down," said he, in a suppressed voice, "and instantly, or I will call for help."

"It is you that shall get down, Yankee that you are. Go back and preach your sermons at home," the young man vociferated.

"I beg your pardon, I am as much at home here as you are, though I have indeed come from a country where it is considered an honor to protect defenceless women.

"Once more, mind your own business, I am travelling with this young lady."

"That is not true. I thought so at first, but I have heard enough to know better. There, the train stops, I advise you to leave quietly, or I will call for assistance."

He opened the door, still holding the arm of his prisoner, who made useless efforts to free himself.

"Now get down, or I will call."

"We shall meet again," cried the young man, precipitating himself from the car, "and we shall fight."

"With you? Nonsense."

"Yes, with me. I shall compel you."

The stranger shrugged his shoulders.

"You are afraid," sneered the other, still upon the step.

"Yes, I should be afraid of killing you. Take care!" and with no more ceremony, he shut the car door, and quietly returned to his place.

Aimée had also taken hers, and sat motionless, her face turned towards the window.

The stranger watched her attentively during a few seconds, and saw that she was trying to control the trembling of her hands.

He rose, and approached her.

"You have been much frightened," said he, "I am sorry I did not help you sooner, but I did not dare, I was not sure, I feared being in the way."

Aimée turned towards him a disturbed face.

"It is nothing," said she, trying to smile, "thank you very much."

"Have you anything to drink? You really ought to take something."

"No thank you, it will pass away," and she lifted her eyes for the second time to the ones looking at her so compassionately and kindly.

It was a young face, handsome and intelligent, where shone two eyes of a clear blue, expressive of benevolence and gayety. His mouth, rather laughing, was nearly hidden by a moustache the same color as his hair, dark and curly, that one could perceive under his travelling cap.

"Have you much farther to go?" asked he.

"No, thank you. I stop at St. Rambert, where I am expected. I do not think we can be very far away."

"Only two stations."

"Do you know that place? Is it as ugly as this?" And Aimée pointed to the monotonous plain which extended before them.

The stranger smiled.

"I have only been in this country a few weeks," said he, "but, you know, all depends upon the comparisons which one makes. To any one who has lived in the Midi,* this country inevitably appears flat and ugly. All is mud color, even the houses seem to be like mushrooms, from their color."

Aimée smiled; but the stranger remarked that her smile was sad rather than gay. He would have liked to ask what she was going to do at St. Rambert, or at least, her name, but he did not dare, for she had not yet said a word about herself, and though her manner was amiable, and grateful, she had, nevertheless, a reserved dignity, which defied all indiscretion.

The conversation quickly languished. Aimée watched aimlessly this new landscape, which had no attractions for her. All her apprehensions had returned, a vague uneasiness filled her heart; a year of waiting seems so

* *Midi*. The south of France. This term is used much as "The South," is employed in speaking of the Southern States.

long, above all, when that year promises only pain and sacrifice.

The stranger, while glancing from time to time at this or that peculiarity of the country, watched her stealthily. Her growing uneasiness and agitation had not escaped him; but what could he do? Does not etiquette—society's laws, compel us to keep to ourselves the sympathy we sometimes feel for our young brothers whom we meet by chance? The young man then kept silent, and contented himself with many conjectures, while watching with an air which he tried to render careless, the pale face, and pure, regular features of his companion opposite.

"Here we are at St. Rambert!" said he, as the train once more slackened. He rose, took down the young girl's valise and portmanteau, and left the car, followed by Aimée.

"Are you sure of being met?" he asked, looking around him.

"Oh! yes, quite sure; thank you. I ought to find the carriage behind the station." She held out her hand. "Thank you!" she repeated; it was all that she could say.

The young man had lifted his cap, and revealed a forest of dark curly hair. He quickly pressed the hand which she extended, and sprang back into the car.

CHAPTER XIV.

AIMÉE'S NEW HOME.

AIMÉE had hardly taken a few steps before a boy approached her, and held out a card.

"Is it for you, mademoiselle?"

Aimée glanced at it.

"Yes, thank you, and here is the receipt for my baggage."

The boy possessed himself of her valise, and preceded her out of the station, where a comfortable carriage was waiting near the platform.

As it was already dark, Aimée did not even look out of the door to notice their route. Had she not a long year before her in which to study that frightful country, of which she already felt tired and disgusted?

She threw herself back in the carriage and closed her eyes, trying to control her agitation, and the beating of her heart.

At last the carriage stopped, and Aimée was ushered into the house by a servant, who preceded her through a richly furnished vestibule, and left her trembling and pale with emotion, upon the threshold of a rather large room, brilliantly illuminated by the flames of a great

fire on the hearth, around which were seated four ladies, all dressed in crape, from head to foot.

At the moment the door opened, four heads were turned towards Aimée, and four pairs of eyes looked at her through four pairs of spectacles, then the youngest of all rose quickly and welcomed her, in very bad French; but with so cordial an accent, and so warm a hand-clasp, that the poor traveller felt her heart grow warm.

“Mademoiselle Valrose, let me introduce you to my aunts.”

The three ladies bowed, and one of them held out her hand to Aimée, asking her if the journey had fatigued her; then she asked her niece to ring.

“It is not necessary, Aunt Lore, I will take Mlle. Valrose to her room myself.”

“But, Maud, my child, it would be better to ring for Catherine.”

Without disturbing herself with this objection, Maud opened the door, and disappeared, followed by Aimée, who asked no better than to escape from the three pairs of spectacles, which inspected her from head to foot.

The young girl mounted the stairway breathlessly, and turned to wait for the traveller.

“This is your room,” said she, opening a door, “and this is mine; they are side by side. My aunts’ rooms are far away, on the other side.”

With these words, she preceded Aimée into a small

room, elegant and comfortable, where a great fire was burning on the hearth, lighting up everything with a pleasant light.

Miss Maud lit the candles herself.

"See," said she, "we can communicate with each other by that door; but if you prefer, we can each lock it from our own side. My room is just like yours," added she; "the only difference is that yours is furnished in blue, and mine in rose, which is very well, as you are almost blonde."

Aimée stunned, stupefied, only answered with a smile, while she asked herself how this small person already knew that she was blonde.

"Now" said Maud, "I will ring for them to bring you some dinner, and I will leave you to rest."

Then coming back again, —

"Do you think," she added, "that my accent is very bad?"

"I can hardly judge yet," responded Aimée, both embarrassed and amused.

"I am so anxious to speak French correctly," resumed the small person, with a deep sigh; "but it is so difficult. Do you think I shall ever succeed?"

"I do not doubt it."

A brilliant smile answered these words.

"Now I will leave you, but" —

"But, what?"

"Is it indiscreet to ask you your age?"

"Not at all; I am nineteen."

"What luck! all the others were much older. I am eighteen, but I am much smaller than you," added she, with so regretful an air that Aimée could not help laughing heartily, while she said to herself that it would be a great pity to change anything in that tiny figure which harmonized so well with the little brown head, whose graceful movements she could not but admire.

At this moment the servant entered, and began to arrange the table.

"Now," said the young girl, "I am going; I hope you will have a good night's rest. I will try to make no noise in undressing, but I am so awkward that I cannot pass a chair without upsetting it."

She held out her hand to Aimée.

"You are frightfully pale, — are you ill?"

"No, not at all, only very tired."

"Ah! well, that is not contagious, fortunately; you see" — And she began to laugh with all her heart, "you are already my fourth companion within three months. The first — wait — yes, I remember, she knew just enough French to be a child's nurse; she only stayed a few days. The second had a — what do you call it? — you know what, those nervous movements in the face; it seemed that it was very contagious, for I began to make faces, immediately; she stayed three or four weeks. The third could not read aloud without being

hoarse. At the end of a fortnight, my aunts sent for the doctor, who discovered a malady of the larynx. She left at once; I did not even dare to say good-by, for you know, it is very contagious. No one has yet *gone* into her room, and I think that if my aunts saw you now, they would be afraid for you to sleep here; but that is all the same to me, I wished it, because I was delighted to have some one to talk to, and, as I had papa on my side, I succeeded. Besides," she added, while her velvety black eyes shone with mischief; "you will see very soon, I always have my own way."

With these words she ran off, leaving Aimée somewhat amazed, and asking herself if all young Americans were as communicative as Miss Maud.

"It is hardly worth while to open my trunk," thought she, kneeling before it to untie the cords; "they will discover some malady, soon, no doubt, and will send me away without giving me time to pack. After all, I would not be very sorry, though the beginning is not so terrible as I supposed."

And while she was thus musing, Maud had returned to the parlor, and had fallen like a bomb in the midst of the three scandalized ladies.

"Well," said one of them, the eldest, doubtless, for her gray hairs were covered with a tiny cap, light and elegant, and which strongly resembled a cock's comb: "you have stayed long enough to have become well acquainted. I will engage that you are already intimate."

"Not yet, Aunt Isa; but it is her fault, not mine."

Mademoiselle Vaudrai pursed her lips, and murmured some words, of which one could only distinguish "bad education."

"I thought her frightfully pale," added another of the old ladies; "I fear greatly that we shall have trouble."

"Oh! it is nothing, Aunt Estelle, she is only tired, she told me that she was in perfect health."

"We will see what the doctor says. Have you sent for him, Dolores?" added the lady, without noticing her niece's words.

"No, not yet; I thought that he could see Mademoiselle Valrose on his next visit."

"Oh! Aunt Lore, how nice you are; I am sure it would have annoyed her greatly."

The lady smiled, and the young girl drew her chair to hers.

"I think," said she, confidentially, "that we shall get along perfectly."

"But, my darling, you do not know her yet."

"Dolores, what nonsense is that child saying?"

"I am telling Aunt Lore a secret, you ought not to listen, Aunt Isa."

"Do you know," added the little mischief, lowering her voice still more, in order to excite the curiosity of the two other ladies, "I have a presentiment that we have succeeded."

"It was time," sighed Aunt Lore, "but what makes you think so?"

"Oh! I do not know; everything. To begin with, she is beautiful, and has a distinguished air; and I am sure she is good, I have seen it in her smile, and in the way which she looked at me."

"Little goose, remember that you are nearsighted; you have only half seen her, as happens often enough."

"That is impossible, I have looked at her quite close, with and without spectacles. I will describe her to you, and you will see to-morrow if I am mistaken: her hair is neither blonde nor brown, and very wavy; her mouth, when she does not smile, has a melancholy expression, but it is just what I like; her eyes are splendid, and she has lashes as long as *that*."

"Have you measured them?"

"No, Aunt Isa, I have seen them."

"Maud, you must be on your guard against your exaggerations; no one will believe you," added the lady, severely.

"But, Aunt Isa, I do not exaggerate except by my gesture — there is papa!" and, with a spring, the young girl was in the arms of a very tall and very brown gentleman, whom she strikingly resembled, and who had been standing for several seconds on the threshold.

"Papa, she has come" —

"Who, what, my little girl?"

"Number four, Mademoiselle Valrose."

“Ah!”

“You do not seem glad.”

“Do you want me to jump for joy around the room? Let me see her first. Does she please you, my child?”

“What a question, Edwin! When have you ever heard Maud say that any one displeased her. She has no taste or discernment.”

“Ah! really! I have never perceived it.”

In saying these words, Mr. Wallson drew his daughter upon his lap, and pinched her cheek to punish her for her lack of judgment. Maud began anew the enthusiastic description she had already given of her new companion.

“Shall you not be glad to see her, papa?”

“I am afraid my impatience will not let me sleep.”

“Oh, how naughty you are! everybody laughs at me, I am going to bed.”

“Have you been at the factory until now, Edwin?”

“Certainly, I should have come home sooner, otherwise. I waited till Douay returned.”

“Has he had a successful journey?”

“Not very, I believe; he has not found the people he wanted to see, but one of these days he will go again. Just now, he will resume the direction of affairs—What are you doing there, Maud? I thought you had gone to bed.”

“Oh! I am in no hurry, but I am going now; good-night,” and she vanished.

CHAPTER XV.

WALKING AND TALKING.

A LIGHT tap on the door of communication notified Aimée that her companion wished to speak to her. She went to open the door, and received her in the midst of the disorder which a new installation always necessitates.

"Have you slept well, Mademoiselle Valrose? I made no noise yesterday evening."

"Thank you," and Aimée returned the young girl's cordial clasp; "I think," she added, smiling and resuming her work, "that you could have upset all your chairs without disturbing my slumbers."

"Oh! please leave all that, now, and come to breakfast, papa wants to see you before he goes out."

Not without apprehension, Aimée followed the young girl to the dining-room, where the master of the house was pacing up and down, while waiting for them. At the sight of him all her fears vanished, for Mr. Wallson, like his daughter, possessed the rare gift of cordial simplicity, which set the most timid at their ease.

They went to the table, and the repast was much less embarrassing than Aimée had expected.

"I hope," said he, as soon as Maud left the room,

“that you will soon be quite at home here ; it is not so much to stimulate my little daughter’s zeal,” continued he, “that I have wished you to stay, but as a companion and friend. Hitherto, our experiences have not been brilliant, my sisters-in-law have not been very fortunate. That is why I have acquiesced in my daughter’s wish to have a companion of her own age, with whom she could laugh and talk at her ease. Her aunts are very kind, but not fitted to replace the mother she has lost, and to bring up a child with a temperament like Maud’s. They do not in the least understand her, and see in her only a badly educated little girl ; but you will soon see, if you take the trouble, that under that mischievous and careless exterior is hidden a straightforward nature, and an affectionate heart. Now I shall leave you ; I must go to my business.”

He went out, and Aimée returned to her room to arrange her dress.

She had hardly finished when her door once more opened, and a smiling little face made its appearance.

“Would you not like to go out, Mademoiselle Valrose ? The air is very mild, and we have permission to stay out of doors until lunch.”

Aimée willingly shut the desk which she had opened to write to Mr. Arnould, and took her hat.

“Will you not put on a cloak ?”

“It is not necessary, since it is not cold.”

“How fortunate you are ! I have to be wrapped up

like a mummy. My aunts would not let me go out otherwise."

"Are you ill?" asked Aimée, looking closely at the small face which emerged from a mass of furs.

"I? Not at all; only you know after mamma's death my aunts are always afraid, and they think if they wrap me up in this way, they will preserve me from some sickness."

While talking, the two young girls followed the long avenue of lindens, still leafless, which had given the name to Mr. Wallson's property, and which soon led them to the open country.

The air was pure and light, and, though nature was still asleep, one felt the approach of spring in each breeze which caressed the cheeks of the two walkers.

They walked in silence for a minute or two, when the little American turned suddenly toward Aimée, —

"Mademoiselle Valrose, do you think I am like my aunts? Each of them pretends that I am her living portrait, and yet they are each as different as possible."

"How can I tell," responded Aimée, laughingly, "I have hardly seen them. But it seems to me that you resemble your father too much to be the portrait of any of your aunts."

"But" — she hesitated — "I have, nevertheless, inherited one thing from them, a frightful thing. You must have already noticed it."

Aimée smiled.

"Is it not dreadful? And I can have inherited it from no one else, for mamma was not nearsighted, and papa has excellent sight. I was so afraid you would be nearsighted, also; the one before the last was, you know, the one who had that nervous affection. You can imagine the effect we produce when we are all together."

"Can you, really, not do without spectacles?"

"No, not if I wish to see; I have tried, but I have made so many blunders that I have had to resign myself. Do you think them horrible?"

"Why, no; they give character to faces which lack it." It was Maud's turn to laugh heartily.

"I am so glad," resumed she, "that you should know my aunts; you will see how funny they are. They say that Aunt Isa used to be very beautiful and very learned; at present, she is *only* very learned. She gives me my lessons, but I do her no honor, as you will soon see. She is also the oldest, and the severest. She holds to propriety and decorum above everything, so she thinks that I have received a lamentable education, which makes papa laugh, for he does not care for decorum.

"Aunt Estelle is the second, and as learned after her fashion as Aunt Isa. She has made quite a profound study of medicine; she teaches me—what do you call that horrible science which treats of the human body?"

"Physiology."

"Yes, physiology; it is the lesson that I detest the

most. I forget all those horrible names as quickly as I learn them; but Aunt Estelle wishes me to continue, because she thinks that a woman who does not know a little about medicine has no right to live—it is her hobby.

“Aunt Dolores, or Aunt Lore, as I call her, is the youngest and the nicest. I like her the best, but she is frightfully afraid of her sisters, and does not dare to spoil me, as she would like.”

She checked herself, but added, instantly, —

“You were also brought up by an aunt, were you not? Was she as funny as mine are?”

Aimée crimsoned, and did not answer at once.

“I loved Aunt Martha as one loves one’s own mother,” said she at last, in a voice which trembled a little.

Maud looked at her, and cried, in a tone of petulance and grief at once, —

“There, now! I have given you pain. I am sure that you already regret having come.”

“No, no; not yet.”

“Did you come against your inclination?”

Aimée hesitated.

“Not exactly, but I should have preferred to go to my home at Silveréal, if I had not been thought too young to live alone.”

“I am very glad of it, and I hope you will be thought so for a long time yet. You do not know how tired I am of living here. Papa is nearly always at the works;

we know no one, we never go anywhere, and no one comes here."

"Why?"

"My aunts think it more proper on account of our mourning; but, meanwhile, I am dying of ennui. Do you think you can stay?"

Aimée smiled.

"I hope so," said she, "that is, if your aunts do not discover that I have some disease."

Maud did not answer, and kept silent for a quarter of a minute.

"Would you object," said she, then, "to call me by my name?"

"Is it not a little soon?" answered Aimée. "What will your aunts say?"

"What they like, that matters little; it will please me; but I would like also to call you by your name."

"Of course."

They left at this moment the open path, to take a little path bordered by hedges.

"Are you not going rather far?" asked Aimée.

"We will return to the house immediately; we are just at the entrance of the park, that you must have seen from your window; but first I am going to show you one of the curiosities of the country. Look there, at the right, do you see?"

"No, I only see a house."

"A house! do you call that a house? Come, we shall soon be in front of it. Is it not a real palace?"

They had just reached a handsome gate, behind which was the house to which Maud had given the name of a palace.

"Is it not charming?" repeated the young girl, lowering her voice. "Look at those balconies, those marble columns, those conservatories! Well, this gem is inhabited by a frightful man!"

Aimée looked at her, surprised and incredulous.

"Yes, a frightful man," repeated Maud, still in a low voice, "who never leaves home, and never sees any one except the doctor, who was a friend of his childhood."

"What is his name?"

"St. Rock. But when you have seen him, you will understand why the people here call him 'Old Rock.' People are not stupid; they soon found out that the first part of his name is almost a sacrilege."

"But what harm has he done?"

"I know nothing about him; it is all a mystery, only the doctor knows all his life, but he will never speak about it. In a few weeks," continued the young girl, "if you come here, you will see the most splendid beds of flowers that you can imagine; all these walks will be bordered with rare plants and shrubs, whose perfume you can smell from here. He has a passion for flowers, and his greenhouses are marvels."

"How do you know that?"

"Through the doctor. It was he who" — she checked herself.

They heard a step upon the gravel.

"Let us go," said Aimée.

"No, wait a minute, I want to see him; yes, it is he; look how he walks, with his head bent, he does not see us."

An old man advanced slowly, his hands behind his back, his head uncovered, talking to himself in an undertone, as men often do who live alone. A movement on the part of Maud attracted his attention, he raised his head, glanced toward the gate, and faced about abruptly.

"I think he looks unhappy rather than wicked," murmured Aimée.

"I am not of that opinion," replied Maud, moving away. "Come, we shall be late," and traversing the path, they soon gained the park entrance.

"You can choose any path you please," said Maud. "All lead to Rome, that is to say, to the Lindens. They cross and separate, only to have the pleasure of meeting and crossing again; they always remind me of quarrelsome children, who sulk and make peace, just to begin quarrelling again. — You will see how pretty it will be here in a few days," added she; "when the trees are covered with young leaves, and the birds sing from morning till night. The sun will not be able then to reach the paths, as it does to-day."

"Is not that a pity?" asked Aimée, who instinctively thought of a life which no ray from above can illumine.

"A pity? Oh! no, the coolness is delicious. It is the only place habitable during the summer months."

At this instant, the sound of a bell reached the young girls.

"That is for lunch," cried Maud, "let us run, we are not very far from the house."

The forest grew thinner, and in a few moments they were outside.

"We will not make an elaborate toilette to-day," said the young girl, springing into the house, "let us hurry!"

Some moments later, both entered the dining-room, where the three ladies were solemnly waiting for them.

"We shall have a storm," murmured Maud, in Aimée's ear, as she seated herself near her.

Mademoiselle Isabeau broke the silence first, in order to show, elaborately and severely, that tardiness is worse than any fault, coming always from laziness, carelessness, or lack of respect for others.

Here, Maud's foot pressed Aimée's, which gave no answering touch.

Then Mademoiselle Estelle took her turn, confirming her sister's words, to prove that this defect so insignificant apparently, generally brought with it a whole *train* of disasters, not only as regards the soul, but, above all, as regards the health of the body. She developed her theory minutely, until an irreverent yawn from her niece checked her. The lady looked at her watch.

"Maud, it is time to go and rest. Mademoiselle Val-

rose, I think you will do well to do the same; you seem fatigued."

"Thank you, I never sleep during the day."

"In that case, you can employ these two hours as you will; Maud must rest, it is necessary for her health."

The two young girls retired, and Aimée went to finish her letter; after which, she went in search of a servant to whom she gave it. Then she wandered from room to room, until, feeling a little tired, she went to the window, and leaned against it.

At the end of a moment, the noise of a door opening gently was heard, and she saw Mademoiselle Dolores, who smiled at perceiving her.

"Do not disturb yourself," said she, "I came to knit here a moment, while my sisters are resting; that is a habit I have never been able to acquire. Have you had a pleasant walk this morning?"

"Yes, but a little too long, I fear," responded Aimée, smilingly; "we came back by the park."

"By the park! I am sure that Maud stopped at St. Rock's; she is like babies who always want to see what frightens them; but behind a gate, where they feel safe."

"Is that man really so bad as to frighten people?"

"Really, I know nothing about him; nobody knows him except his friend, the doctor, who is also our friend; but one might as well ask a tombstone, as ask him."

"Has he no family?"

"No, that is to say, I do not know; he has not always

lived here; he came here, they say, in order to be near the doctor, who has been his friend from childhood. But he has from the first closed his door to all visitors, even to us, who are perhaps the oldest family in the country; the Vaudrai, as any one could have told him, if he had taken the trouble to inquire."

In her indignation, the little lady dropped a stitch, which she picked up in silence.

When she resumed, her thoughts had taken another turn.

"Your task here will not be difficult," continued she, "as you have already been able to see. Though Maud has been brought up à l'*Américaine*, that is to say, not brought up at all, she has a good disposition, and an affectionate heart. The dear little girl suffered greatly from the death of her mother, and would have much preferred to return to America; but our poor sister, who wished to see her home and family once more before she died, also made her husband promise to leave the care of Maud's education to Isa and Estelle. You understand, it was very natural, she had herself been brought up by my sisters, our mother having died at her birth. Edwin, I mean Mr. Wallson, tried to persuade us to go back to America with him, but we did not have the courage; ten days at sea! We were all sick at the bare thought. Edwin felt that he could not leave his daughter, that he ought to stay, and so he bought this property, had it arranged after his liking, and begged us to come

and live with him, and I think he congratulates himself now that he did not go back."

"Really!"

"I do not mean to say that, at the first moment, this decision did not cost him much, and I think that if he did not have his glass works, he would grieve still; but, happily for him, his activity suddenly awoke, and he had the good idea of establishing at his own expense, a small glass factory, a short distance from St. Rambert. Any one else would have been frightened at the idea; the enterprise was so uncertain, but, thanks to the enormous capital he could employ, he has been able to make something colossal, so colossal, that he has been forced to take a partner, to superintend things, for, you see, Edwin, Mr. Wallson, I mean, occupies himself just enough for a distraction. As soon as he began to feel the care of it, he wrote to one of his friends, who had long wished to establish himself in Europe; besides, all Americans are the same, they do not think they have lived, unless they come to Europe, at least once. It is this friend who is now at the head of the business. But—I hear a step on the stairs. Go, and dress quickly for our drive; my sister does not like to be kept waiting."

Aimée hastened from the room, and narrowly missed stumbling against Mademoiselle Isabeau, who uttered a cry of indignation. The young girl excused herself timidly, and, a few minutes later, the five ladies took

their places in the elegant carriage in which, each day, they took their established drive.

"Where shall we go to-day?" asked Mademoiselle Isabeau.

"Perhaps," suggested Maud, "Aimée would like to see the factory?"

"You mean Mademoiselle Valrose."

"No, I mean Aimée; she has permitted me to call her by her name."

"In any case, it is too late to go to the factory to-day," responded the lady, dryly.

No one made any further suggestion, and the coachman, receiving no order, quietly took the principal drive.

It was with a sigh of relief that Aimée descended from the carriage, and went up to her room, where Maud followed her.

"I hate Aunt Isa," cried she.

Aimée did not answer.

"Why do you not say something?"

"Because I hope that is not true."

"True or not, I think her abominable, and I am sure you do, too."

Aimée could not help laughing, and her little companion approached the window.

"Do you play the piano?" asked she, turning suddenly.

"Horribly; I began too late."

"That is nothing, I have some duets, come."

And without waiting her consent, she drew Aimée from the room. Happily for them both, Mademoiselle Isabeau was not in their way.

They were so gayly occupied, some moments later, that they did not hear the parlor door open and shut.

“Good heavens! What a racket!” said a voice near them.

Maud turned quickly, and, upsetting the piano stool, ran to her father.

The evening passed gayly. Once near him, Maud knew no constraint, and, sure of his approbation, she let herself act as she would, and say and do all the foolish things that came into her head. It mattered little to her, Aunt Isa’s severe looks and offended airs; her father appeared perfectly happy, and that was all that she wanted.

“Dear Edwin,” said Mademoiselle Isabeau, as soon as the young girls had retired, “are you really going to permit Maud to call Mademoiselle Valrose by her Christian name?”

“Why not, if that pleases her, and if Mademoiselle Valrose consents?”

“Do you not think it will spoil her, to treat her so familiarly?”

“What do you mean by spoil?”

“Is it not bad for her to be placed upon a footing of perfect equality with your daughter?”

“And why should they not be on a footing of equality?”

It is true that Mademoiselle Valrose has received a better education than Maud, and that she has a more distinguished air than my noisy little girl, but if she permits her to be her friend, why should I hinder her?"

As he said these words, Mr. Wallson began to stir the fire, in order to hide the mischievous smile which he could not repress.

"Edwin! Is that really your idea?"

He started.

"What have I said that was remarkable? You nearly frightened me, Isa."

"You are grateful to Mademoiselle Valrose because she permits Maud to be her friend?"

The lady spoke slowly, emphasizing each word. Mr. Wallson slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"I am grateful," said he, at last, "towards those who do good to my daughter, and I can only rejoice to see that Maud cares for her new companion." Mr. Wallson's tone was almost grave. "I have been very careful this time," continued he, "I have not admitted her here carelessly, for I begin to be tired of these perpetual changes."

After which Mr. Wallson did as men generally do, after they have drawn upon themselves feminine discontent,—he hastened to say good night, and withdrew.

"All men are the same," murmured Mademoiselle Isabeau, after a few moments of silence. "All, with-

out exception, let themselves be captivated by a pretty face; they never see deeper than the exterior."

And with these words she rose, and retired with dignity, followed by the approving murmur of her heavy train.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MUTUAL RECOGNITION.

It was the hour assigned by the Misses Vaudrai for their niece's rest.

Aimée was, in consequence, alone in her pretty room, seated near the open window, a book upon her lap; she was indulging herself in the luxury of a reverie.

It was Sunday, her first Sunday at the Lindens, and it seemed to her that weeks, even months, had rolled away since her arrival. Not that she was tired or unhappy; on the contrary, not for many years, since the loss of Aunt Martha, had she been so happy. God had guided her feet; she was sure of it. He had brought her here, and that thought filled her with happiness and confusion at the same time. He had not treated her as she deserved, according to her struggles, her apprehensions, her lack of confidence. A sigh of relief swelled her breast, she raised her eyes, wet with tears, towards the heaven to which Aunt Martha had lifted so many prayers, which came back to her child now in a shower of blessing; which surrounded her as with a protecting shield, and which would, one day, lead her victorious, to that home where she had preceded her; where she had entered in with a radiant look, and cry of triumph.

Perhaps, she knew, at that very moment, of the paternal Hand which would never abandon her little Aimée.

Here she was interrupted by Miss Maud, who entered without asking permission, as a guest, sure of being welcome.

"What have you been doing all this time?" said she, approaching the window.

"I have been reading, as you see." And Aimée pointed to the book open on her lap.

Maud looked first at her companion's face, then at the book.

"Is it a sad story that you have been reading?"

"No, why?"

"Because you have been crying."

"Then I did it without being conscious of it. I forgot myself a moment in some memories."

The brown face took an uneasy expression.

"Are you unhappy? Do you want to go away?"

"No, no, not for anything in the world," responded Aimée, warmly.

A very warm kiss, if a rather rough one, rewarded these words.

"You do not know how relieved I am. I feared that you could not endure Aunt Isa. You are often sad when you do not talk, and that frightens me."

Aimée smiled.

"I assure you that you have nothing to fear; I have not the slightest desire to go away."

"And you love me a little?"

"A great deal, do you not know it?"

"No, at least, I was not sure about it; you never pet me."

"It is because I have lost the habit; in the days of old, I used to devour Aunt Martha with kisses." And as she said this, Aimée drew the pretty little face to hers, and kissed it tenderly.

"Now," said Maud, her velvety eyes sparkling, "we must go down; I am sure that the gentlemen expect their coffee; I always give it to them on Sunday."

"What gentlemen?"

"Papa and his partner."

"Must I go down, also?"

"Of course, you know well that I cannot do without you."

Aimée rose, and followed the young girl to the parlor, where Mr. Wallson, installed *à l'Américain*, in a great arm-chair, talked with a young man, standing near the fire.

"Mr. Douay," said Maud, advancing and extending her hand to the new comer, "permit me to introduce you to my companion." And she added at once, with a gay burst of laughter, "I see what you are thinking, but you are mistaken, it is the last time."

The young man responded gayly to her words, and turned to greet Aimée, who had been looking at him

attentively. She had already seen that curly head, she had already heard that voice. She was sure of it.

What woman was ever ungrateful enough to forget the features of the one who had protected her, rescued her from danger? She waited until he should recognize her in his turn. He was bowing gravely, when he stopped suddenly, motionless with surprise, but his hesitation did not last a second.

"I did not think," said he, advancing, "that I should so soon have the pleasure of seeing you again;" then he added, with a rather mischievous smile, "I hope you did not suffer from your journey."

"No, thank you," responded Aimée, blushing slightly.

"But," cried Maud, "do you know each other?"

"Our acquaintance is of very recent date, Miss Maud. I had the honor of travelling with this young lady, the day of her arrival at the Lindens."

The little lady frowned.

"That does not explain" —

"Really? You will understand some day."

"Some day! As well say never. Why not now?"

The young man, somewhat embarrassed, turned towards Aimée, who rose under the pretext of going in search of the coffee.

"Now," said Maud, as soon as the door was shut behind her, "tell me quickly."

"You are a true daughter of Eve, Miss Maud, you do not deserve to have your curiosity gratified. But for

our common repose, and mine in particular, I had better obey." And he had soon enlightened her upon what so greatly interested her.

As he spoke, the little face, shadowed for a moment, cleared joyously ; at last she drew a sigh of relief.

"How glad I am!" murmured she.

"Of what?"

"Oh! I do not know; nothing." She turned away, a little embarrassed; "I could not understand how you had become acquainted so quickly, it is so unlike her."

At this moment Aimée entered, and Maud rose to pour out the coffee.

"So," said she, "you did not know that you would meet Mademoiselle Valrose, again, here? There! all your coffee on the carpet! How nervous you are to-day. I believe that you are trembling."

"I beg your pardon," said the young man, without turning, "I have made a frightful stain."

"That is nothing," said Mr. Wallson, "pour out another cup, Maud."

The young girl obeyed, but not without a mischievous smile.

"I advise you to seat yourself near the tray," she said, "you might tremble again. There, now, I am more tranquil; but you have not answered my question."

"Which one? That wretched stain made me forget everything."

"I asked you — but, no, that does not interest me any more. Tell me of your journey to the Midi. Why did you come back so soon?"

"Because there was nothing to keep me."

"What luck! that enabled you to fall in with Aimée: but what I do not understand is, that you did not comprehend she was coming here."

"You must excuse me, Miss Maud, but the arrivals and departures are so frequent, lately, that it is not surprising" —

"You are as bad as papa and all the rest," interrupted the young girl, "I will not talk to you."

And she sat herself down near the fire, resolved not to open her lips for an indefinite period.

The two gentlemen resumed their conversation, and Aimée seated herself near the window with a book.

"What are you reading that is so interesting?" cried Miss Maud, at the end of a minute; "since I have been looking at you, you have yawned three times!"

"A dissertation on names."

"Good gracious! I understand your interest."

"The author pretends that all names ought to have some meaning."

"The author is an idiot; is he not?"

"Did you speak to me, little girl?" asked Mr. Wallson, breaking off his conversation.

"No, papa, to Mr. Douay."

"To me? I beg your pardon, I thought" —

"Oh! I know what you thought," cried Maud, laughing, "that is all the same. Are you not of my opinion?"

"About what?"

"Is it not better that names should have no signification?"

"Why?"

"Because then they cannot be in contradiction with the character. Have you never remarked that all the Blanches are brown as nuts, or red as cherries, that the Patiences have generally the gentleness of a volcano, that the Désirées are detestable, and so on?"

The young man began to laugh.

"Perhaps you are right," said he, "but there is no rule without an exception."

"Come, Aimée, tell us your opinion, you have some acquaintance with the subject."

"I am like you. I prefer names which have no signification." She, doubtless, remembered the days when her own name seemed a bitter irony.

"Bravo! I was sure of it. So you do not like your own name?"

Aimée hesitated a second.

"I like it," said she, "on account of those who gave it to me." And as she raised her eyes, she met those of the young man, fixed upon her with an expression that she could not define, which left her perplexed and discountenanced.

He perceived it, and turned away his head.

"Come, little girls," said Mr. Wallson, "give us a little music."

Aimée looked terrified.

"Do not be afraid," murmured Maud, in her ear, but loud enough to be heard by every one. "Mr. Douay is nearly as great a musician as papa! he cannot for his life distinguish a true note from a false."

"I know some one who strongly resembles me upon that point," responded the young man, tranquilly rising and leaning against the chimney-piece.

Maud was right; the most outrageous discords did not seem to move him, or disturb his serenity. Once or twice even, and in the very worst moments, a very gentle smile lit up his face, and brightened his eyes.

An exclamation from Maud broke the charm abruptly.

"I am sure," she exclaimed, "that we shall not have the time to dress for dinner."

And with her habitual *brusquerie*, she dropped the piano lid and ran out of the room.

After dinner, each one sought to pass away the time as agreeably as possible. Aunt Lore took her knitting and her book, while her sisters played their eternal game of tric-trac. Mr. Wallson was absorbed in a paper, and his partner, with or without intention, sat down by Aimée, while Maud, seated upon the carpet, watched with a dreamy air the flames on the hearth, which lent a special glow to her pretty face.

"We must take Aimée to the factory one of these days, must we not, papa?" cried she, suddenly.

"What is it, little girl?"

"How tiresome! you never hear what I say to you."

But Mr. Wallson was already absorbed in his reading again.

"Have you never visited glass works?" asked the young man, addressing himself to Aimée.

"No, never; is it interesting?"

"Certainly; ask Miss Maud, rather. When you come," he added, "I will show you all the changes I have had made in my own habitation."

"Oh! I hope that you have not touched it; that would be a crime. Just think, Aimée, Mr. Douay has the luck to inhabit, all alone, an old castle."

"An old ruin," corrected the young man."

"No, an old castle, with delightful round towers and battlements."

"Bats' nests, and all crumbling to pieces."

Maud shrugged her shoulders, and resumed: "And oriel windows hidden under the ivy which covers the walls, and a stone balcony, which would make the most prosaic dream — I cannot understand what embellishments you have added."

"I simply allowed myself to clear the windows."

"Why?"

"Why? To let the sunshine visit me, and keep me from rheumatism in my old age."

Maud made a disdainful grimace.

"Men think always of rheumatism. They sacrifice everything to that *bête noire*."

"Do you find that so astonishing?"

"No, no, nothing astonishes me. I believe you are capable of cutting down the terrace trees, of tearing down the ivy, of whitewashing the walls, and of scratching the moss from the balcony columns. Everything is possible, when it is a question of rheumatism."

Aimée began to laugh, but the young man succeeded in keeping his gravity.

"You are right," said he, "one cannot make enough sacrifice for one's health."

Maud did not answer, her indignation was too great for words.

"Does the factory employ many workmen?" asked Aimée.

"The greater part of the male population near here; there is work for all, even for the children. I am sure that you would find it interesting to see them at work."

"Aunt Lore," interrupted Maud, "what are you doing?"

"I am reading, my dear child."

The young girl burst out laughing.

"I thought you were crying over your knitting."

"I am reading an elegy," replied the little lady, in a moved voice.

"An elegy? And that made you cry? — Oh! Aunt Lore, read it aloud, that would be so amusing."

"Elegies are never amusing, Maud, and this one is particularly touching."

"Whose is it, Dolores?"

"I do not know, my dear Isa; it is entitled, 'The Poor Girl.' Aimée, my child, will you read it," added the little lady, passing her the book.

Aimée protested with a look; but as every one seemed waiting, the Misses Isabeau and Estelle had stopped their game, and Mr. Wallson had raised his head, she was forced to begin:

*J'ai fui ce pénible sommeil
Qu'aucun songe heureux n'accompagne,
J'ai devancé sur la montagne
Les premiers rayons du soleil.
S'éveillant avec la nature,
Le jeune oiseau chantait sur l'aubépine en fleurs.
Sa mère lui portait sa douce nourriture, —
Mes yeux se sont mouillés de pleurs.*

*Oh! pourquoi n'ai-je pas de mère?
Pourquoi ne suis-je pas semblable un jeune oiseau
Dont le nid se balance aux branches de l'ormeau?
Rien ne m'appartient sur la terre,
Je n'ai pas même de berceau,
Et je suis une enfant trouvée sur une pierre,
Devant l'église du hameau.*

Loin de mes parents¹ —

¹ I have fled from this painful slumber
That no happy dream accompanies;
I have reached the mountain
Before the first sunbeams shone there,

Aimée broke off the reading, and closed the book.

"But that is not all, my child; there are two stanzas more," said Mademoiselle Lore.

"I cannot read any more."

The eyes of all but one in the room were fastened upon her.

"You have a sore throat, I am sure of it," cried Mademoiselle Estelle. "It seemed to me that your voice was not clear."

The poor child shook her head.

"Such childishness is out of place," said Mademoiselle Isabeau, dryly. Then she added, in her most gracious tone: "Mr. Douay, will you be good enough to finish it?"

The young man raised his head and stopped twisting his mustache.

"I? Oh! no, thank you," and taking the book, he quietly shut and returned it.

"It is a pity," sighed she, "the young people of these

Waking as nature awoke.

The young bird sang on the flowery hawthorn

Its mother carried it sweet nourishment, —

My eyes are wet with tears.

Oh! why have I no mother?

Why am I not a young bird

Whose nest hangs in the young elm's branches?

Nothing belongs to me on earth,

I have not even a cradle,

And I am an infant found upon a stone,

Before the church in the hamlet.

Far from my parents —

days entirely lack ease and simplicity. That elegy is Soumet's; it is one of the prettiest of its kind."

"I detest it," cried Maud; "in the first place, because it has made us all cross, and then because it is so frightfully melancholy; fortunately, it is not true."

"If it is not for any of us, it is certainly so for some people, my child."

"I hope not, Aunt Isa, it would be too dreadful."

No one answered her. The young man had risen, and was walking to the end of the room. Mr. Wallson had resumed his reading, and Aimée sat motionless, her head leaning on her hand, neither seeing nor hearing what was going on around her; feeling only one thing, which, in all its bitterness, burned her heart like a hot iron.

Fortunately for every one, the door opened suddenly, and Mr. Douay's carriage was announced. As soon as he was gone, the young girls followed his example, and went up to their rooms.

"Do you like him, Aimée?"

"Whom?"

"Mr. Douay."

"I do not know, yet."

"Did you notice how he looked at you? I believe he would have liked to kill Aunt Isa. He is the best fellow in the world."

"Because he wanted to kill Mademoiselle Isabeau?"

And Aimée laughed, but rather bitterly.

"No, no, don't laugh; I know him. He was pale with

indignation; I know that he cannot bear injustice, and Aunt Isa was unjust."

"Not quite, for she must have thought me stupid and stubborn."

"Well, I know some one who thinks you neither, I am sure of it. You cannot know," continued she, sinking upon a sofa, "how our life is changed now. Papa is not the same person, since he has given him the charge of the factory, and as for the factory, it is a real blessing. Perhaps you think," added she with animation; "that the workrooms once closed, he rests, and crosses his arms. Well, no, he has thought of arranging rooms, even in the factory, where the workmen can spend their winter evenings in reading and playing; and there he spends the greater part of his time, not for his pleasure, as you can understand, but in order to maintain order and discipline. Sometimes he lectures to them, and that is the way he tries to teach them and get them interested. He used to busy himself after that fashion in America, in his father's great works; but, you see, he was not obliged to do it here, no one asked it of him; it was of his own accord that he undertook the task, and only for the love of humanity. So you can understand how he is loved, not only by the workmen, but, above all, by their wives, who cannot tell him often enough how happy they are, and how much better treated since their husbands do not pass their evenings drinking in the taverns. You see that I was right when I said that he

was the best fellow in the world; but I had no need of telling you, you would soon have discovered it. Now, I am going to bed, I have exhausted all my eloquence. Good night, my darling, and above all, do not dream of Aunt Isa, nor of that frightful elegy."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DOCTOR AND THE OGRE.

HARDLY had Aimée returned to her own room, after breakfast, the next day, when her door was suddenly opened, and Maud threw herself upon the sofa, in a paroxysm of gayety.

"Do not look at me in that astonished way, Aimée," said she, "you will kill me." Then recovering her gravity, "You must go down! the doctor is waiting for you; Aunt Estelle sent to inform him that you suddenly stopped in the midst of your reading, and he has come to see with his own eyes what could have caused such an accident."

Aimée shrugged her shoulders.

"That is absurd," said she, "I shall not go."

Maud began to laugh most heartily.

"I advise in this instance, but in this instance only, you to submit as gracefully as you can. The doctor and I are intimate friends, and we talk of everything in the world, except sickness. He has known my aunts a long time, and calls them by their Christian names. He attended their mother and mine, that is why he comes to see us so often."

Not quite reassured, Aimée allowed herself to be con-

ducted to the little parlor, where the doctor and Mademoiselle Estelle were holding a council.

"Here is your new patient, doctor," said Maud, as they entered. "I fear she is as seriously ill as I am."

"In that case," responded a round little man, with a jovial face, and head as bare and polished as a mirror, "I have only to congratulate her."

With these words he held out his hand to the young girls, and drew Aimée to the window.

"Do not be afraid," said he, "your sore throat cannot be serious."

"But I have no sore throat."

"Are you sure of it?"

"Quite."

"But I was told" —

"It is a mistake, I am in perfect health."

"Have you a good appetite?"

"Yes, sir."

"No palpitation?"

"Never, without a reason."

"In going upstairs?"

"No."

"No caprices?"

"I do not understand. I do not think that is my defect, though it might seem so."

"O! that is not my business," said the doctor, smiling, "I mean caprices as regards your appetite."

"No, I think not, I do not know,"

"Well, well; no fever, no organic disorders, a good appetite! one cannot ask for more."

"Mademoiselle — what is your name?"

"Aimée Valrose."

"Mademoiselle Aimée is in perfect health, Aunt Estelle. Make her take long walks, to put a little color in her cheeks, that is all she needs. And Diablotin? what has she to say for herself to-day?"

"Nothing, doctor," said Maud, who knew that this pretty nickname was addressed to her.

Aimée approached the door, and was about to open it, when the doctor called her back.

"Ah! Mademoiselle Aimée, that is treason; one never parts from one's doctor without a salutation."

Aimée held out her hand and fled.

"Where did you get hold of that pair of eyes, Aunt Estelle?"

"Edwin discovered her by means of an advertisement."

"When does she leave?"

"Doctor, you are naughty."

"Why, Diablotin?"

"You know as well as I; but this time you are well caught, — Aimée is never going to leave us."

"Ah!" —

"You are not convinced?"

"Yes, yes; but how did she manage to find mercy?"

"I am not sure that she has found mercy in Aunt Isa's

eyes, but I am not afraid; papa and I are leagued against her, and that is sufficient."

The doctor burst out laughing.

"Oh, these little Americans, how they talk! how they manage old and young! And of whom are you afraid?"

"Not of you, doctor."

"Oh, as for that I am sure of it; you do not need to tell me. Now I must go. Adieu, little American. I hope your new friend will influence you, since she is going to spend her life with you."

"Are you in such a hurry, doctor?"

"Yes, Aunt Estelle; that is, unless you need me. I have promised to return to breakfast with my old friend, and I have still some calls to make."

"Is he as wicked as ever?"

"You have still no pity for him, Diablotin?" said the doctor, in a half-serious, half-comic tone; come, is a nettle wicked because it stings when one touches it? My old friend is like a nettle; if one just touches him, he stings; but if one clasps him bravely, the stings hide themselves, and he hurts no one."

"I prefer to believe it rather than try the experiment."

"You are a little goose, Diablotin, not to have discovered that my nettle is incapable of hurting any one, even a fly. Adieu, I must run away, I shall be late."

"Adieu, doctor, for a short time."

A few days after, as Aimée reached the end of the little park, where she went for a daily walk while Maud was resting, it occurred to her to glance through the gate of their terrible neighbor. But she had hardly approached it, when a rough voice cried from behind a shrub, —

“What are you doing here?”

She sprang back, and was about to run away, when a gay laugh was heard near her, and a fat hand was held out to her through the gate.

“O doctor, how you frightened me! let me go,” added she, trying to withdraw her hand. “I am really afraid that he will come.”

“He? Who? One would say that you spoke of an ogre in a fable, Mademoiselle Aimée. And even if *he* came, do you think *he* would eat you?”

With this the doctor opened the gate, and invited the young girl to enter.

“No thank you, I dare not, I only came to see if the beds were yet planted in flowers.”

“It is too early; they would be in danger of frost. Do you like flowers? Will you not come with me to see the conservatories? you will risk nothing, the ogre is taking his midday nap.”

Aimée hesitated.

“Are you sure of it, doctor?”

“Am I sure of it? I have just left him. And your throat, how is it?”

"As bad as ever."

"Well, well, that pleases me. Come, it is this way, but what is the matter? I really believe that you are holding your breath."

"But if he should come out, doctor?"

"Why, I told you that he was sleeping; besides, if he sees you, it will be nothing. He will turn his back, that is all."

"Why does he dislike everybody?"

"Who told you that? It is that little goose, I am sure of it; she is convinced that the poor old fellow is Bluebeard himself."

"But why does he live all alone?"

"Because he likes it. It is his whim; every one has one. For a long time he has had a prejudice against his fellow-men and, with avoiding them, he has come to be afraid of them, and of women in particular, because they are the cause of all our sorrows, you know."

"I think it would be better for me to go."

The doctor held her by the arm.

"Why! you are almost as silly as your friend. There are the conservatories," and he pointed out a line of buildings with glass roofs. "Do not say anything until you are inside. Those conservatories are one of his hobbies; he loves his flowers better than living beings, he speaks to them, he cares for them, one might say he petted them."

"I did not know that you lived with him, doctor."

“And I do not. Have you not seen on the right, that affair which resembles a porter’s lodge? That is where I live; it is not very large, but it is large enough for an old bachelor who is never at home. I rented that little place to be near the ogre, with whom I take my meals, and spend my evenings, when I am not summoned elsewhere.”

While talking, Aimée and her conductor had reached the conservatories, and walked into the first compartment, which they slowly examined in mute admiration.

Great camelias, with gigantic stems, extended their branches, loaded with white, pink, and spotted flowers, while, beneath them, younger plants raised their dazzling petals towards their elders, and seemed silently to vie with them in their splendor.

Aimée pursued her way as in a dream, breathing the intoxicating perfume of the flowers, hardly knowing if what she saw was real, or the work of her imagination, and believing herself, at least, transported to tropical regions, which displayed their incomparable riches expressly for her.

“Are you sorry that you came?”

“Oh! no, no! I have never seen anything so beautiful.”

“I have no doubt of it; you would have to go far enough before you found anything like it. Come, now I will show you the glory of St. Rock,” continued the doctor, opening the door of the last compartment, “but we can only stay here a moment, because the orange

trees are in bloom. See, has that not the appearance of a great bridal bouquet? After the season of flowers, we often pass our evenings here. Will you sit down?"

"No, thank you, I am not tired."

"Then come, you had better not stay, this perfume will give you a headache."

Aimée looked longingly around, and breathed a sigh of regret. She was about to cross the threshold, when she checked herself abruptly.

"Some one is coming," said she, "I hear a step, I am sure of it."

"It is one of the gardeners," answered the doctor. "Why, you are quite pale, you little coward."

"Ah! Where are you hiding yourself?" cried a scolding voice. "I have been looking for you for an hour."

At the same instant, the rather wizened and bent figure of the old man, whom she had once seen, appeared at the end of the compartment. At the sight of the young girl, at first hidden behind the doctor, he started as if he had been stung, and was about to turn away, when his friend stopped him.

"I thought you were having a nap," said he, "and I was improving the time by showing Mademoiselle Valrose the conservatories; she has not the happiness to possess any, though she loves flowers as you do."

The old man turned, rather unwillingly, and awkwardly lifted his hand to his velvet cap. Aimée ad-

vanced, and, hardly knowing what she did, like a bird which lets itself drop into the serpent's mouth, held out her hand to the old man, who appeared frightened at first, and hardly touched that little hand, whose touch, light as it was, seemed to cause him a strange sensation, as if some one had pressed his throat.

"Mademoiselle Valrose lives at the Lindens," resumed the doctor, in order to say something.

The old man glanced at Aimée, and muttered some unintelligible words, to which the doctor answered with a burst of laughter.

"Mademoiselle Aimée, Mr. St. Rock asks if you are the new victim."

Aimée blushed.

"I am Miss Wallson's companion."

This time the old man looked closely at her.

"It is the same thing," said he.

"No, I think not," responded she, surprised herself at her own audacity.

The doctor laughed again, while his friend lifted his heavy eyebrows with a somewhat astonished air. They resumed their walk, Aimée the first, she having only one desire,—to leave the conservatories as soon as possible. The two gentlemen followed her slowly, talking in a low voice.

"He is furious," thought she, "the doctor will pay dear for this complaisance. If only I had not listened to him; if I had not had the silly idea of looking

through the gate. I will never come near it again, never, notwithstanding all Maud may say to persuade me."

Here she was interrupted by a hand which pulled her dress, brusquely. She almost cried out.

"There! he said that you liked them." And the old man placed in her hand a bouquet, such as she had never seen, neither in dreams nor reality.

She stood motionless a moment, then her long lashes, dropped upon the flowers, were raised upon the old man.

"You are too good," murmured she.

"Do not ever repeat such a falsehood," said he, in a gruff voice.

At this moment they left the conservatories, and Aimée, followed by the doctor, went towards the gate, while the old man disappeared by another path.

"After all," said the physician, with a mischievous smile, and look at her bouquet, the ogre has not been so dreadful, and you are still whole."

Aimée made a sign in the affirmative.

"Is he very angry with you?" asked she, after a moment.

"I will tell you at your next visit."

"In that case, I shall never know. Adieu, doctor, thank you." She held out her hand to him, and ran up the path which led to the park.

"Now," murmured the doctor, shutting the gate, "I will go and find out" —

"Where in the world have you been? I have been waiting for you for a half hour," cried Maud, perceiving her friend from the window, behind which she had waited a minute, at the most.

In four steps Aimée was by her side, and exhibiting all her wealth.

"Where did you find that? I have never seen anything like it, except in St. Rock's beds, but that is impossible."

"Impossible is not French."

"You do not mean—Surely you have not dared to take them?"

Aimée laughed gayly.

"Take them! Oh! no, that is against my principles, he gave me them, himself."

"He? Who?" asked Maud, astounded.

"Mr. St. Rock, your *bête-noir*."

"I will never believe it."

"Then you may ask the doctor, that will teach you to doubt my word; meanwhile, we will divide."

"No, no, those flowers are yours."

"Certainly, that is why I am giving you half."

And, while she divided her bouquet, Aimée narrated to the astonished Maud, her visit to the conservatories, and her meeting with the terrible old man.

"Now, what shall we do?"

"Oh! I forgot," cried Maud, "you made me forget myself. The carriage is to take us to the works, and

Aunt Lore will go with us, because Aunt Isa has a headache, and Aunt Estelle has to remain to nurse her. You see," she added, with her eyes shining with mischief, "that pleasures are like sorrows, they never come alone."

Aimée could not help laughing, and ran off to her room.

"You do not need to make an elaborate toilette," cried Maud, "you will always be the prettiest, in no matter what costume."

A quarter of an hour later, the carriage drove away, with a very gay and animated little party, which did not in the least resemble the grave and distinguished ladies it bore daily.

"What a pity," said Maud, suddenly, "that Aunt Isa has not a headache a little oftener, is it not, Aunt Lore?"

"But, my dear child, what are you saying?"

"Only what I was thinking, Aunt Lore,—is it not delightful for us three to be alone?"

"Certainly, but you ought not to forget that your aunt suffers a great deal."

"That is a pity. I sincerely wish that her headaches were less painful, but more frequent."

"Hush, my little girl."

"No, Aunt Lore, I will talk to-day. Tell me why you are so unlike Aunt Isa."

"I do not know. My sister has always been infinitely superior to me."

The little mischief burst out laughing.

"But, Aunt Lore, what nonsense! You are much prettier and nicer than Aunt Isa, and I love you a million times better. And Aimée, also, she has told me so. You do not know how pretty you are in that costume. How could we manage to go together every day?"

"No, my child, no! do not say such a thing; your aunt would be so hurt."

"Do you think so? I have a great mind to propose it to her."

"Maud, my child, promise me" — the little lady was pale with fright.

"Anything you like, Aunt Lore, but only to please you, and because I love you."

"Well, well, my darling, I know I can depend upon your word. There are the factory chimneys; do you see them, Aimée?" added she, to turn the conversation.

The young girl turned, and Maud began to recount all the improvements her father and his partner had brought about in the factory.

At last the carriage stopped, and the three ladies went to Mr. Wallson's office.

"Guess who has come to see you, papa," cried Maud, entering.

"That is truly rather difficult," answered her father, gayly, returning her caress.

"Oh! you are not — Ah! I knew that you would be agreeably surprised," continued she, as Mademoiselle Lore made her appearance, followed by Aimée.

"I think," said Mr. Wallson, turning towards the young girls, "that Douay could show you the factory, he must be in his office."

"Will you come, Aimée?" asked Maud, moving towards the door.

At the sound of the light steps and gay voices approaching, the young man's head, bent over an enormous folio, was raised quickly, and his eyes shone with pleasure. He came to meet his young visitors, and shook hands, warmly.

"We have come to see the factory," said Maud, "have you time to show us around?"

"Have I ever failed to have the time to serve you, Miss Maud? But will you not sit down?"

"No, thank you, we are not tired."

The young man then proceeded to conduct his visitors through the numerous branches of the factory.

"Does it not resemble an ant-hill?" asked he turning towards Aimée, who had stopped, and was looking with astonishment at the moving crowd, coming and going, passing and repassing, like real ants.

"Quite, but this heat is almost unendurable; I wonder how these poor people can stand it all the days of their lives. Do they not suffer much?"

"At first, yes; but they soon become accustomed to

it; nevertheless, to tell the truth, they cannot bear it for many years."

"What do they do, then?"

"We employ them otherwise; you have only seen the places where the glass is melted, it is not the largest part; there remains the cutting, engraving, packing, etc. Are you tired?"

"No, not at all."

"Well, come this way."

"Mr. Douay, you will show us the reading and play-rooms?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"Is it true that you teach the most ignorant to read and write, as papa said?"

"Why not?"

"Aimée could not believe it."

"I? I said nothing of the sort."

"No, but I saw it in your face."

"I believe you see in my face just what pleases you," said Aimée, laughing.

The young man looked at her, and smiled.

At the end of an hour, the three came out of the factory, talking as gayly as if they had been old friends.

"Now, to please Miss Maud, I will show you my bat's-nest. Come, it is only a few steps, at the foot of that hill."

"Why, it is charming," cried Aimée, seeing from a

group of trees, the crenelated towers for which Maud had professed so great an admiration.

"Wait before you judge," said the young man, gayly ; "you only see the screen which hides the holes."

"He tells you that just to tease me," added Maud ; "if he had not found it to his taste, that ruin, as he calls it, do you think that he would have bought it ? And just think ! he had the luck to get it for almost nothing, because they pretend that it is haunted. It is centuries since it was occupied."

"Would one not believe, to hear Miss Maud, that I had received this antediluvian habitation as a gift ? Ah ! there is our baby !" he added, seeing a small boy of three or four years old, who came and threw himself into his arms, screaming with joy at feeling himself tossed in the air.

"There, now, that is enough ! go and tell grandmother that Mr. Douay has visitors, and that she must send us something nice."

But instead of obeying, the small child held out its tiny arms.

"Again," murmured he, in a pleading tone.

The young man laughed, tossed the child a second time in the air, seated him like a victor upon his shoulder, and turned towards Aimée.

"This is one of my housekeeper's grandchildren," said he, "the eldest is already employed in the factory ; this one is to be my valet. Won't you, my little man ?"

For all answer the small one belabored the shoulder of his bearer with his tiny feet.

"I always remember my first occupation," resumed the young man, laughing, "and children feel it quickly, they are sharper than we think."

"Have you often carried your brothers and sisters?" asked Aimée, rather puzzled at that explanation.

"Yes, and others also;" he smiled and turned away his head. "Now, go and carry my message to grandmother," said he, setting down the child, as they came into a kind of paved courtyard, around which rose the old building whose merits had already been so strongly discussed.

"I will show you all the marvels of my antediluvian gift," said the young man, introducing his visitors into a charming little room, "but, first, you must rest awhile."

With these words he went out, to return immediately, followed by a woman bearing a waiter of refreshments.

"Would you believe," said he, lowering his voice, as soon as she had retired, "the good creature was so well persuaded that ghosts haunted these ruins, that she would not pass the night under this roof until I had myself spent a month here; she went away every evening, under some pretext, and abandoned me pitilessly to the spirits. Now, she pretends to have forgotten all, and laughs at those who are still frightened."

"As for me, I do not understand why you were not

frightened to death, the first night," said Maud; "I remember that I was so uneasy, I could not sleep."

"It was too good of you, Miss Maud, for I never had a thought of your ladyship that night. *Apropos*, I received a letter this morning, which concerns you."

Maud's cheeks flushed quickly.

"Oh! let me see it, please."

"Always the same daughter of Eve. Take care, Miss Maud."

Thus saying, the young man drew a letter from his pocket, and held it out to her.

During this time, Aimée had left her place, and approached some well-filled bookshelves, whose contents she began to examine.

"Now, that is strange," thought she, "there is a French Bible," and she extended her hand to take a small volume in brown leather, which bore marks of frequent use.

"Those are my books of study, and some volumes of poetry," said a voice near her.

"No, not that."

"O no, that is my French Bible," and he took it in his hand rather quickly. "I was speaking of the other books. Do you read English?"

"Less than ever, now. I have promised to read only French."

"Even when you are alone?"

"O no, but I do not have much time alone."

"I do not doubt that," and he glanced significantly at Maud; "will you come and see the tower, while Miss Maud reads my mother's letter?"

"Yes, thank you."

And she followed him out of the little room, up a narrow and dark spiral stairway, which he mounted as easily as if he saw the way.

"It is a little dark," said he, "but habit takes the place of many things, even of sight. Where are you? Give me your hand, here is a bad step; well, here we are."

And he stepped out by a narrow opening upon a little platform, with tiny walls, considerably worn by time.

"What do you think of this view?"

Aimée looked around, and, raising her eyes upon her questioner, —

"Not much," said she, and she added at once, as if to excuse herself, "perhaps I shall be better able to appreciate it, soon."

He smiled.

"So you find this corner of the earth as ugly as when you arrived?"

"Oh, no, but you know, I have lived in the Midi, and I cannot help making comparisons. When one has always lived by the sea, one must miss it everywhere; even the color of the sky is different, and the foliage of the almond trees is like no other tree; but," she hesitated, "you know it is not the beauty of a place which makes

one happy, and I know now that one can be very happy or very unhappy anywhere."

He would have liked to know what constituted happiness in her eyes, but contented himself by asking if she had good news from her friends in the Midi.

"Since Aunt Martha died, no one writes to me; but, that does not mean that I have no friends," she replied, gayly, "only the greater number cannot even write."

"Shall you be glad to see them, again?"

"O yes! certainly, but I am waiting very patiently."

"I thought you were devoured with a desire to go back to your home?"

"I am a little ashamed to acknowledge that I desire it less ardently. I am so happy here!"

The young man looked at her with a bright smile.

"That recalls to me exactly what I felt myself," said he, "I thought at first that I could never reconcile myself to my new existence, and I find now, that, on the contrary, it would cost me much to give it up."

"Are you already thinking of going back to America?"

"No, certainly not; some time, perhaps, but have you never had a desire to visit the new world?"

"I? Why? Even if I had any friends or acquaintances" — she stopped short.

"Well?"

She blushed with an embarrassed air, then, seeing that he waited, she added, —

"I have a friend in America, I forgot, but as I was

hardly more than five years old when he left, and I do not even know his family name, it would not be easy to find him."

"Have you never had any news of him?"

"O yes! many times, but Aunt Martha did not like writing, and so the correspondence died out."

"Perhaps he is dead."

"Oh! I hope not! he was so good; I hardly remember him, but Aunt Martha spoke of him, often."

"Would you not like to see him again?"

"I do not know, I think not. I would rather remember him as he was at the age of twelve or thirteen. Think how he must be changed now; besides, I have not the least hope of seeing him again, and I am sure that he has long since forgotten my existence."

"Why, you remember *him* well."

"Oh! that is very different; women have better memories than men," said she, laughing.

"Do you think so?" He looked at her with a singularly incredulous look, and proposed to show her the other curiosities of his habitation.

The return home was as gay as the departure, though Maud, contrary to her usual habits, was sometimes a little dreamy. Between Mademoiselle Lore and Aimée, the conversation did not flag for an instant.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MINISTERING.

DAYS and weeks succeeded, and Aimée, to her great astonishment, found herself desiring earnestly that they might roll away with less rapidity.

She did not desire now to be free that she might return to live at the abbey. That moment did not now appear to her so full of joyous promise, and yet, she knew it would surely come; that, some day, it would be necessary to say adieu to all the comfort which surrounded her, and to those who loved her. It would be necessary, whether she wished it or not, to leave this little company, which had so generously given her a place in their affections, and which she loved with all the strength of her being; she would have to leave Aunt Lore, always so good and gentle; Mr. Wallson, also, who had treated her as a favorite and dearly-loved child; it would be necessary to say adieu to their Sunday visitor, that visitor who had long since become the daily companion of their evenings, and whom she had learned, as Maud had predicted, to love and appreciate.

It is so sweet, when one is young and full of enthusiasm, to meet, to learn to love and esteem, one with a

good and noble heart, who does good because he cannot do otherwise, because it is his nature.

It is so sweet, when one is young, to meet and admire a fine intellect, which knows how to employ the best part of its faculties in the service of the good, and whose heart beats in unison with ours in the love of all that is noble and great. And it would be necessary to say adieu to him also, to go away to a solitary life, with its memories only.

At that thought, Aimée's heart was wrung; she thought, sometimes, that it would have been better if she had never come to the Lindens; she would have wished that her heart had been closed to all these new affections, since soon they would be sufferings; for what is our love for the absent? Only a daily suffering, an intense and appeaseless thirst.

The summer had come, the summer with its long days of burning sunshine, with the debilitating heat which takes from us even the desire of life, with the storms which make hearts heavy as well as the atmosphere. Maud, the joyous Maud, herself felt this change of temperature. Like the birds which peopled the park trees, she kept silent during the day, and waited until the last ray of sunlight had disappeared, and the parched earth was a little refreshed. Then, only, she came back to life, and her joyous song mingled itself with the thousand voices from the forest, celebrating the sweetness of a summer night.

One afternoon, as Aimée tried in vain to follow Maud's example, and find in sleep forgetfulness of everything, even of the heat, her door opened gently, and Aunt Lore's face looked in, pale and uneasy.

"Aimée, my child, I am in great perplexity, an accident has happened at the factory, and the doctor" —

"An accident," interrupted Aimée, turning pale, "to whom?"

"Oh! my dear, it is frightful; but it happens very often; above all, to new workmen."

Aimée breathed again.

"The doctor wished to take me, but I have not the courage," added Aunt Lore, pressing her hands nervously, one against the other. "Estelle always goes with him, she alone is capable of supporting the sight of those terrible burns; but to-day she is not well, and if I wake her, she might have one of her bad attacks; that is why I thought that you might, — that you would consent, perhaps, to accompany the doctor. Tell me, my child, will you?"

Aimée looked stunned.

"I am perfectly willing," said she, at last, "but I am so ignorant, that I fear I should be of no use."

"Oh! that is nothing; you have only to do what he tells you. I will go and tell him that you are coming."

And Mademoiselle Lore, much relieved, disappeared in haste. A moment later, Aimée rejoined her in the parlor.

"How quickly you are ready!" cried Mademoiselle Lore.

"It is a good thing for nurses to know how to dress themselves in so short a time," said the doctor, shaking her hand. "Now let us go, the carriage is waiting."

"But, doctor," said Aimée, "I fear I cannot be useful to you. I have never in my life dressed a burn."

"That is nothing, provided that you are not afraid, and that you will be obedient. That is all that I ask."

"I am not afraid," responded Aimée, who felt herself upon the point of giving way.

"Adieu, Lore; tell Estelle that it is not my fault if I have changed nurses. Come, my child."

The carriage vanished, and the little lady re-entered the house, and waited impatiently the awakening of her sisters and niece.

The afternoon was long for poor Maud, who had lost the habit of remaining alone with her aunts. She wandered from one room to another, with deep sighs, which made Mademoiselle Isabeau smile with pity, took a book, went to the piano, then returned to the window, in the hope of hearing the noise of the carriage. But the sun set, the night came, and no one returned.

"Men have no delicacy," said Mademoiselle Isabeau. "Edwin ought to understand that I am uneasy, he ought to know me well enough to know that it is my sensitiveness alone which prevents me from aiding those unhappy

workmen; but, men have no sensibility, and, consequently, cannot comprehend ours."

At the same instant, and as if to contradict her words, a servant entered with a message from Mr. Wallson, who begged his sisters-in-law not to expect him or Aimée that night. He added, that they hoped to save the lives of the wounded, but that their sufferings were great.

At those words, Maud's eyes filled with tears; she could not hear suffering spoken of without suffering herself; perhaps, also, she pitied herself, for it was no little thing for her, this prospect of another day without Aimée.

It was late the next day when the sound of the carriage was heard. Maud sprang to meet it.

"Well, little goose," cried the doctor, "here I am."

"And Aimée?"

"They kept her at the factory, where she is much more useful than here."

Maud was in consternation.

"No, it is not true," cried a voice inside, and the next moment Maud aided Aimée to descend from the carriage.

"Well, Diablotin, are you satisfied with me? I bring her back whole, but they did not want to give her up, and without me, she would have passed a second sleepless night. This Douay is a great villain, look out for him; he is a robber."

Maud shrugged her shoulders, and Aimée ran off towards the house.

"Will you not come in, doctor.?"

"No, I am going to sleep, and you will do well to let your friend do as much. Do you hear? No conversation this evening."

"When will papa come back?"

"To-morrow, probably; do not be uneasy, he slept all night."

"Adieu, doctor, but now, who is nursing the sick?"

"A nurse that we got from Lyons."

The carriage started, and Maud ran to Aimée's room.

"Tell me all, darling, tell me all. Was it very horrible? You are so pale, still."

"I am a little tired. Yes, it was frightful; above all, the despair of the women and children. The doctor made them go away the first thing, and we remained alone with Mr. Douay and his housekeeper, whose grandson is very sick. We hope that all will get well, though one cannot tell before a week; I hear their groans still, it seems to me that they will follow me always."

"How did it happen?"

"I do not know the details, I only know that the accident is due to the imprudence and awkwardness of one of the firemen."

"Did Mr. Douay remain all night?"

"Almost, but the doctor sent him to rest towards morning."

"And papa?"

"They did not let him sit up."

"Was he surprised to see you?"

"Mr. Wallson?"

"No, Mr. Douay?"

"I do not know, he had too much to do, to be astonished."

"What did he look like?"

"Very grave and uneasy."

"How queer it is, I cannot think of him otherwise than making fun and talking nonsense; but the doctor has told me that in such moments, his calmness and presence of mind are admirable. Tell me more about him, did he help you much? What did he do?"

Aimee did not answer. Maud looked at her, and was suddenly seized with remorse.

"You are tired, I see. I will leave you, and to-morrow you will tell me all, even to the smallest details; good-night, darling."

But whether she was not sleepy, whether she was too fatigued to make a movement, Aimée remained a long time motionless, in the same place, her head bent on her hand, her eyes fixed vaguely, and seemed incapable of tearing herself from her reverie. All at once she raised her head, and listened.

"Midnight! I am absurd," and, without waiting further, she rose, passed her hand across her brow several times, as if to drive away her haunting thoughts, and began to undo her hair.

"I did not think myself so ridiculous," murmured she,

"I greatly need one of Mr. Arnould's letters. This is what comes of living like a savage, far from all society; one attaches a significance to little things which mean nothing when one comes to think them over. Is he not good and attentive to every one? It is his nature, he could not do otherwise. But it is permitted to love what is good; no one can prevent me, no one has the right, not even Mr. Arnould."

She frowned, and pressed her lips defiantly.

To love without asking anything, to love for the pleasure of loving, is the rare privilege of some rare natures. Generally, the heart cannot give much without feeling itself weakened, and longing for something in return. But, happily for Aimée, this thought did not even come to her mind, and, when the morning dawned, and the first rays of sunlight shone upon her bed, they found her so profoundly asleep that they could have played long in her thick hair, on her forehead, and even on her rosy lips, without awaking her; and when, a little later, her door opened gently, and a graceful figure, dressed in white, approached the bed and murmured her name, the sleeper uttered a sigh, and would have resumed her happy slumber, if a burst of laughter had not recalled her to life. She opened her eyes, and fixed them upon her companion with a surprised look.

"You are up already! What time is it? I have overslept" —

"What a crime!" said Maud, seating herself at the

foot of the bed; "now guess what visitor I have had, and with whom I breakfasted this morning?"

"Mr. Wallson?"

"No."

"Aunt Lore?"

"No, no, no aunt; with Mr. Douay, who came to inquire after you, and told me all sorts of things which you would never have told me. It is not worth while to blush; in your place, I should be very proud, and boast of my courage and adroitness everywhere."

"What nonsense; I had only to obey the doctor. Does it need so much courage and adroitness for that?"

"Unfortunately, I am not of your opinion, I cannot bear the sight of a burn."

"I thought for a long time that it was the same thing with me; day before yesterday, even, I went without knowing if I could be of the least use, but, once there, I felt I had to" —

"And I, I feel that I must kiss you and run away. Dress yourself quickly, we will go during the day to ask after the sick. *Apropos*, old Caton * Mr. Douay's house-keeper, does not cease repeating that if her grandson recovers, she will owe it to you."

* Caton. An old-fashioned feminine name.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PAIR OF SPECTACLES.

“*MADemoiselle Aimée*, what luck to meet you here! Will you do me a favor?”

“Willingly, doctor, if it is in my power.”

“I have just found in my pocket my old friend’s spectacles; will you carry them to him? I am in a hurry.”

Aimée made a significant grimace.

“You have nothing to fear,” continued the doctor, laughing, “the ogre is more inoffensive than ever, he had a sprain yesterday which will keep him on his sofa for one or two weeks. Before going out, I established him on the verandah with his papers. I do not know how I came to take his spectacles, unless” —

“Give them to me, doctor, I will go home quickly, and send one of the servants to him,” interrupted Aimée.

“No, no, if you will not go, I will go myself; it is not worth while to take so much trouble; I am sure that he is already in a rage because he cannot read his papers.”

“In that case, I will go,” said the young girl, sud-

denly resolved by the little doctor's cross tone. "But what will they think of my absence? Maud ought to be awake now."

"Do not be troubled, my road takes me straight to the Lindens. I will tell them, in passing, where you are."

"Thank you."

And Aimée, without too much good will, went in the direction of St. Rock's.

When she reached the gate, she hesitated a second, then, collecting all her courage, she opened it and advanced resolutely along the path where the old man was accustomed to walk.

As she approached the house, her steps slackened in spite of herself, and her heart began to beat.

"I am absurd," thought she. "One would really say that I was going to meet a wild animal, and not to return to a helpless old man his precious spectacles."

But that did not hinder her from feeling her pulses quicken more than usual.

She looked right and left, in the hope of perceiving a servant to whom she could give them, but all was deserted, and the only noise that she heard was her own step upon the gravel.

"If only the verandah curtains were not down," thought Aimée, "and I could see what he was doing, perhaps that would give me courage. Ah! there is a little opening—yes, he is there, but—I believe that he

is asleep; I will try to lay the spectacles down without awakening him ”

She mounted the stone steps noiselessly, and found herself in front of the old man, who abruptly opened his eyes, moved upon his couch, and tried to sit up.

“I beg your pardon,” said Aimée, “I met the doctor, who sent me with these spectacles, which he found in his pocket; he thought you would need them.”

The old man held out his hand, and murmured some words of apology.

“He would have brought them himself if he had not been so hurried,” added she, preparing to leave.

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

“It is always the same thing, they are in a hurry when they want to be, these doctors. Imbecile,” murmured he, trying fruitlessly to reach the papers placed near him, “he does everything upside down; he carries off my spectacles, and puts my papers a mile away.”

Aimée hastened to give them to him, and was about to take her leave, when a door opened and a servant appeared.

“Do you need anything, sir ? ” asked the new comer.

“No.”

“Will you take your coffee, sir ? ”

The old man turned towards the door with an irritated look.

“Must I not eat, even if I have sprained my ankle ? ”

The servant disappeared, and Aimée was about to do

the same, when the old man threw his papers and spectacles away from him.

"He might have spared you the trouble of bringing them," said he, crossly; "who can read in such a position?"

Aimée had picked up the paper, and looked at the poor man with a feeling of fear and compassion.

"I could, perhaps, read to you myself, if you wished," added she, surprised at her own audacity.

"You!" He seemed amazed. "How long since women knew how to read?"

Aimée could not help smiling.

"I think that I know; at least, I have supposed so."

"Without stammering, without whining, without sing-song?"

"I will try not to do either."

The old man did not answer, and Aimée drew up a chair.

"Where shall I begin?"

He hesitated — "With the correspondence," said he, at last.

Aimée obeyed, and read without stopping for almost half an hour. At that moment the servant came in with coffee.

"Do you wish any?" inquired the old man, brusquely.

"No, thank you, I never drink coffee."

"What do you drink, then?"

"Tea, "

"You might say water with a certain taste."

Aimée, this time, could not help laughing.

"It seems to me," said she, "that one might say as much of coffee."

The old man looked at her, and his face lit up; it was the first time.

"Shall I continue?"

"Yes, if you are not tired."

"Do I read very badly?"

"No, not for a woman."

Quite proud of such praise, Aimée resumed her reading. When she had finished, she looked at her watch, and rose quickly.

"I must go! It is later than I thought. May I come back to-morrow?"

The old man turned an astonished look upon her.

"To-morrow? Why?"

"To read to you; that is, if you wish it."

He did not answer for a moment.

"Why do you want to read to me?" He spoke hesitatingly, as if he regretted each of his words.

"I do not know. It must be so tiresome to be all alone, without being able to do anything."

He turned away, and closed his eyes.

"Good-by, until to-morrow," said Aimée, and she ran off, her heart so light and joyous, that it seemed easier to fly than to walk.

She had just entered the little wood which led to the

Lindens, when she perceived through the foliage a figure, which turned quickly at the sound of her step.

"It is he! Why is he here?" And she struggled with the emotion which made her heart beat.

"How you have made me wait!" said the new-comer, shaking hands with her.

"I?" and she looked with astonishment at the young superintendent of the factory.

"Certainly," replied he, with the same mischievous smile; "since it is a half hour that I have been here waiting, for fear of missing you."

"Are you going to the Lindens?"

"No, I have just come from there; I was there when the doctor passed. How did he receive you?" And he looked in the direction of St. Rock's.

"Not so badly; I am to go back to-morrow."

"Is it that prospect which makes you look so happy?"

Aimée blushed deeply.

"Perhaps," said she, then she added with a little agitation; "is it not strange that one so often deprives one's self of the pleasure of doing a little good to the suffering and unhappy?"

"It is our egotism which deceives us, and thus deprives us of one of the purest joys we can have."

"Oh! I was only thinking of myself in saying that."

"Do you suppose that I do not share the weaknesses of humanity?"

"Maud has often spoken to me of all that you have done for the factory workmen."

He laughed.

"Miss Maud is a little enthusiast; one must never believe more than half she says. Now, I will give you my message from your invalids."

"But they are well, are they not?"

"Yes, nearly. They send you word that they will never forget all that you have done for them, and that, if the day comes when you will need aid, you must not forget them, then."

Aimée did not answer immediately.

"If they knew," said she, at last, "the little inclination I had to go with the doctor, and how I wished that Mademoiselle Estelle would awake before I started, they would not be so grateful, and they would have some reason not to be."

"But you do not regret your sacrifice?"

"Oh! no, I am only sorry that it should have been one; I think you find it hard to understand me."

"I?" his blue eyes became grave. "I understand you, because I know what it costs to sacrifice one's tastes to one's duties; but I know also how sweet is the feeling of duty accomplished; above all, when one has done it to please the One who never judges our actions, but our intentions."

"Is it not difficult to act like that always?"

"Perhaps, only one must not forget that if we do

good only in the sight of men, we receive our reward already."

She looked gravely at him, and met his kind smile.

"Here we are at the park entrance," said he, "I must leave you."

"Will you not come in?"

"No, not this evening, I have been absent from the factory a long time."

She held out her hand, which he held closely in his for a moment, and they separated.

The next day, and on the days which followed, Aimée profited by the hour of Maud's rest to return to St. Rock's, and, according to her promise, read to the old invalid, who was, nevertheless, careful to show her no gratitude, and always received her with his crossiest air. But as soon as the first moment was passed, his wrinkled face softened by degrees, and Aimée generally returned with a heart light and joyous, happy in having succeeded in brightening a little that lonely life, at the bottom of which, she was sure, existed some secret sorrow, all the deeper because it was hidden.

One afternoon, as she was returning in all haste after her daily reading, she met the doctor, who from afar saw her, and barred her path.

"O doctor, let me pass! I am in a hurry; Maud is waiting for me to go to the factory, with Mademoiselle Isabeau."

"That will be a good exercise for their patience, Mademoiselle Aimée," said the doctor, winking mischievously; "you know you ought not to neglect any opportunity for the improvement of your pupil. Besides, I have only two words to say to you."

But Aimée knew that the doctor's two words could be prolonged indefinitely.

"Do you think that Mr. St. Rock will soon be able to walk?" she asked.

"That is just what I was going to tell you. I think that he could, easily, if he wished to; but he is so cunning, he knows well that his reader will abandon him as soon as he can move."

Aimée blushed with pleasure.

"O doctor! are you sure? Do you really think that my visits please him? He is always so gruff when I arrive."

"What would you have? It is his manner; he is original from head to foot."

"It is not a very agreeable originality."

"I have found a charm in it: there are so many people who do not care anything for me, and yet smile at me all day long, that I do not grumble if I am a little ill-treated by one who really cares for me."

"But how do you know that he likes my visits? Has he told you?"

"Oh! no, indeed. When he says such a thing, we shall have to bury him. But I am very perspicacious,

though it may not seem so, and I see many things that are not told me, and that people even try to hide from me. Formerly, for instance, he would insist that I should remain with him for the afternoon; now he sends me away, under the pretext that my cigars are not good; then, hardly has he finished breakfast, than he wishes to be carried to the verandah, where he forbids any one to disturb him, on the plea that he wishes to sleep."

"But perhaps all that is true."

The doctor laughed.

"Let your mind be easy, I can see clearly, though my eyes are much smaller than yours. But I must leave you, I am wasting my time. Adieu," and he hurried off.

"All alone?" said he, as he entered St. Rock's verandah.

"Am I not always alone?" responded the old man, from the sofa where he was lying.

"Ah! then she has not been here these last days."

"Yes, yes, she's been here, but she only stayed one or two minutes; she is always in a hurry, like all women who have nothing to do."

"In that case, I am glad I came back early; I could read to you for a while."

"You? No, thank you, you read much too badly. Besides, the papers tire me, politics do not interest me any more."

"What interests you, then?"

"Nothing."

The two men kept silence; the doctor lit his cigar, and stretched himself in the most comfortable arm-chair in the verandah.

"Do you know who she is?" suddenly asked the old man, in a slow voice, almost in a whisper.

The doctor smiled mischievously.

"Are you speaking of Mademoiselle Valrose?" A significant grunt answered him. "No, I know nothing about her."

"Is she rich?"

"I suppose not, I never heard of the rich working for their living."

"Are they kind to her?"

"Where? At the Lindens? They all adore her, except *la belle* Isabeau, and I should not be surprised if the epidemic extended as far as the factory."

"You think, then, that she is poor."

"That depends upon one's idea of poverty. Diogenes thought himself rich in his tub."

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"It is so stupid to be always trying to be witty."

"What would you have me do? I try to hide my miseries as best I can."

There was an instant's silence, during which the helpless invalid stirred uneasily upon his couch.

"Perhaps it is foolish," he murmured, "perhaps she is no better than the rest, perhaps I am again deceived."

"What did you say? I did not understand."

"Nothing, nothing; if I was sure of not doing something foolish" —

"What would you do?"

"I would leave her something in my will, if only to keep her from want, later in life, you know."

There was a pause, during which the old man seemed to wait anxiously.

"The idea is not bad," said the doctor, at last, "but you ought to think it over a little, and find out something about her."

The sick man's face lit up.

"No, no," said he, "since you do not think it a bad idea, I need not wait. Wallson would never have taken her without good recommendations; that is sufficient. I have never said anything to her, but this will prove that I am not as ungrateful as I seem. Will you give me some paper?"

"No, you can write another time; just now, I want you to try to walk."

"But I have already told you that I cannot put my foot to the ground."

"Really, that is what I told Mademoiselle Aimée," said the doctor, carelessly. "She asked me if you could not soon walk. I think that she would not be sorry to walk about a little with you, instead of remaining in a chair, like an automaton. These girls from the Midi are like quicksilver, they cannot stay in one place."

"If you think so, I will try, but you must help me. Give me your arm."

The doctor obeyed.

"You see now, I was right, as usual," said he, reseating the old man, who seemed quite surprised at having made the tour of the verandah. "Now we have done with this affair, and you are free to sprain your other ankle, if you think fit."

"Thank you, I have not the least inclination, but if you will help me to my office, you shall be free also to do as you like."

"You are thoughtful with your permission. It was worth while to rush home like one possessed; I am well rewarded, truly."

But the old man did not appear to hear him, his eyes were dreamy, and his lips moved.

"Come, then," said the doctor, approaching, "I think we can do it without any one's aid." And putting his arm in his, they left the verandah together.

"Does your foot hurt you?" asked the physician, seating his friend in his arm-chair near the desk.

A negative movement was the only answer. The doctor was about to go away, when, with a gesture, the old man recalled him.

"Bayard, advise me."

"About what?"

"About that little girl. Do you think she is really what she seems? If she were deceiving me, as the

other — that makes me hesitate — yet, I do not want to be unjust, nor do her wrong because her eyes are the same, and her smile as innocent. Perhaps she is really a true and good woman. What do you think ? ”

“ I ? Nothing. I am not so suspicious.”

“ If you had had your heart torn from your bosom,” cried the old man ; “ if the light of your eyes had been taken from you, if your only joy had been destroyed, and you had been left bare, ruined by the roadside, and the demon who did it all was a woman, — would you not have learned to be suspicious ? ”

The doctor’s face had become so grave that one could hardly recognize it.

“ Listen, St. Rock,” said he, after a moment’s silence : “ it is better to avoid this subject, for we differ greatly ; in my opinion, her only fault was that she had neither name nor fortune.”

“ It is no fault to marry against a father’s will,” cried the old man, vehemently ; “ it is no fault to rob a man of his only son, — to destroy forever his happiness and his life ? ”

“ You are not just, you forget that he loved her, that he wished no one but her for his wife, and that he preferred to see himself disinherited and driven from home rather than renounce her.”

“ An honest woman would never have permitted him to sacrifice himself after such a fashion ; she would have reasoned with him.”

“Reasoned! when one is a child, when one loves, and is loved,—it is easy to say it. But here we are, far away from your idea; it is my opinion that you had better postpone your project.”

With these words, the physician hastened to leave the room.

Left alone, the old man dropped his head upon his breast, and sat motionless for a long time. When he raised his head, his resolution was taken.

“Good or bad,” murmured he, trying a pen, “she will see that I am not ungrateful; if she does not deserve it, at all events, I shall never know it, and if otherwise, I shall have done a good action, which has not happened for many a day.”

CHAPTER XX.

A HASTY DEPARTURE.

AIMÉE, never dreaming of the debate of which she was the subject, reached the house gayly.

"No," thought she, "I have not deserved to be so soon rewarded," and, unconsciously, her beautiful eyes were lifted, and sought the sky through the thick foliage.

She walked quickly; first, because she was happy, and then because she knew that they were waiting for her to go to the factory.

"It is strange," thought she, as she approached the house, "the door is not open. Have they given up the idea of going out? And Maud is not at her window, something must have happened."

She quickened her steps, and went towards the parlor, when Aunt Lore came out, her face greatly disturbed.

"Oh, my dear!" she cried, "I do not know what will become of us. Edwin, Mr. Wallson, has just received a telegram which tells him that his only sister is very ill, and desires to see him again. He is about to start, and absolutely insists upon taking Maud with him, in spite of all the remonstrances of Isa and Estelle."

"When will they start?" asked Aimée, in a voice which she tried to render steady.

"I do not know ; at once, I think. But come in, Mr. Wallson has already asked for you."

"No, thank you, I will go to my room first."

But she had hardly taken off her hat before a servant came to say that Mr. Wallson wished to speak to her.

"It is the end," thought she, and her heart throbbed at the thought of the solitude which was to be her lot ; a sad smile came to her lips, as she remembered that this moment had once been so earnestly desired. Mr. Wallson came to meet her, and drew her to a seat near him.

"You have heard of my trouble ?" he said.

Aimée made a sign in the affirmative.

"I have too little time," he continued, "to lose in thinking. I must go ; it is my duty."

"Does Maud go, also ?" asked Aimée in an altered voice.

"I hesitated a little about taking her, but now I have decided to do it ; not because I cannot leave her, but because it would be such a pleasure to my sister to see her again, that is, if we have the joy to find her living."

Aimée kept silent.

"It is just on the subject of her departure that I wished to speak to you," continued Mr. Wallson.

The poor child pressed her hands together to keep from trembling.

"I fear," continued he, "that life at the Lindens will seem rather dull to you without your little friend, and I

am afraid of being selfish if I ask you to remain, all the same, and to wait for us here."

Aimée's face had flushed deeply.

"Mr. Arnould," resumed Mr. Wallson, "has spoken to me in his letters of your desire to see your friends, and to return to live near them; I am then asking you to make a real sacrifice, but I ask it in my child's name. She cannot bear the thought of not having you with her when she returns."

"The real sacrifice," answered Aimée, lifting her clear eyes towards Mr. Wallson, "would be for me to return to the abbey. I will gladly await Maud's return."

"Even if her absence lasted several months?"

"Yes," said she.

"It is a great relief to me, and I cannot thank you enough."

"I do not desire any thanks, I make no sacrifice; it is quite the reverse."

"I am very glad of it, my child, for Maud seemed persuaded that you would wish to return to the Midi, and that thought troubled her greatly. I hope," he continued, "that our absence will not be longer than two months. During that time, I beg you to consider my house as your home, and to employ your time as you like, so that it will pass as pleasantly as possible."

"Thank you," responded Aimée, rising: she said no more, but the tone of her voice, and the moved expres-

sion of her face told Mr. Wallson all that she could not say.

"I am sure," said he, accompanying her to the door, "that Maud is waiting for you impatiently; she will doubtless need you to help her in her preparations for the journey."

Aimée vanished, and ran to her companion's room, where she found her, kneeling sadly before a great empty trunk, in the midst of a heap of linen, dresses, cloaks, and other things. Her pretty face bore traces of recent tears, which began to fall fast at the sight of Aimée.

"I am so sorry for you," murmured the latter, clasping her in her arms. "I did not know you loved your aunt so dearly; you have rarely spoken of her."

Maud raised a desolate face.

"I am not crying about her," said she vehemently, "that grieves me, but I am not crying for that; it is a shame, is it not, to deceive everybody so? I am crying" — she threw her arms around Aimée's neck, and clasped her convulsively — "I am crying because I shall not see you any more, because when I come back, you will be gone to that Silveréal, which I wish was at the bottom of the sea."

A gay laugh answered her words.

"Is that all? Then comfort yourself, my darling, I will wait for you months, a year, if need be. Do you not know that I am happier here than anywhere else? Why should I go away?"

Like an April sky, veiled in clouds for a moment, Maud raised her pretty face once more, still wet with tears, but with a brilliant smile shining over it.

"Is that true?" said she; "do you not want to go back to the abbey?"

"No, not as long as you want me with you," answered Aimée warmly.

"And you do not think me a horrible creature to have thought more of my own happiness than of my poor aunt? I love her dearly, you know, but the idea of not finding you here was too much for me. Now I am at rest, and if I cry, it will be no pretence."

Aimée could not keep from laughing, Maud was so prettily selfish, that she could not help it.

"When shall you start?"

"To-morrow; we shall reach Hâvre just in time to take the steamer. Will you help me pack?"

"Willingly."

The two young girls went to work, talking gayly, and making many plans for the future.

It was late when they separated for the night. Aimée had been in bed several minutes, when Maud, dressed in a long white robe, slipped into her room, and seated herself upon the bed.

"It is useless," said she, "I cannot sleep; I have such frightful presentiments."

"You are too tired; to-morrow all your gloomy ideas will have disappeared, you will only think of a pleasant sea voyage."

Maud shook her head sadly.

"I do not know what it is," murmured she, "but I have such a weight here" — she pressed her hand to her bosom — "I am not afraid of shipwreck," continued she, "I never think of it, even; it is something else which makes me uneasy, but I do not know what. You are quite sure that I shall find you here when I come back?"

"As sure as that you see me here now, if God spares my life; nothing in the world could make me leave."

"Even if Aunt Isa became still more dreadful?"

"Even if the house was full of Aunt Isas."

"And if Mr. Arnauld ordered you to return to Silveréal?"

"I shall be of age next month, and, consequently, my own mistress."

But Maud did not yet seem satisfied.

"It is because you love me that you are staying, and that you will wait for me, is it not?"

"Yes, for that reason only."

"And will you promise me to stay here until you do not love me any longer?"

"That is a horrible supposition," said Aimée, caressing the small face bent so uneasily over her's; "I might as well promise to *go away* because I love you."

"It would be a strange way of showing it."

"Are you satisfied, now?"

"A little more so, but not quite."

"You must go to bed, my darling, or you will be too tired to start to-morrow."

Without answering, Maud clasped her friend in her arms, pressing her closely, until a sob rose to her lips; then she fled to her room, and hid her face in the pillows.

Maud was gone, and the entire house seemed plunged in profound mourning. In the corridors, one met gloomy figures with handkerchiefs to their eyes—Aimée, herself, had instinctively laid on one side all bright colors, in order to array herself in sombre hues, never thinking that it was for her advantage thus to show her clear complexion and graceful figure. Her beautiful face was paler than usual, her eyes seemed dimmed with tears.

The evening had come, and, one after another, the figures had slipped noiselessly into the parlor, and taken their accustomed places around the table.

No one had the courage to speak, and the silence was only broken by sighs and stifled murmurs.

All at once a quick step on the gravelled path, and a tap at the hall door abruptly changed the thoughts of the four ladies gathered there.

"Who can come at such an hour?" cried Mademoiselle Isabeau. "Aimée, I forbid you to open the door."

But it was too late, the young girl had already held out her hand to the new-comer, and her bright color

sufficiently indicated that she, from the first, had recognized the visitor's step.

"How good of you to come, Mr. Douay," cried Aunt Lore, "we are all so sad."

"Is that why you are bolted in after such a fashion?" responded the young man, gayly, shaking hands with the three ladies, one after the other. "I was on the point of going back, thinking it was a plot to get rid of the unfortunate."

"And you wisely thought that you were not one of them," said Aunt Lore, kindly.

"I did not think anything about it, I only listened to my own wishes," said the young man, who, from some feeling of gratitude, seated himself by the little old lady.

"We have had doors and shutters closed at night-fall," resumed Mademoiselle Isabeau, "and we shall do it until Mr. Wallson returns; it is always best to be prudent, the house is so lonely."

"Do you fear thieves?"

"I fear all sorts of robbers," answered Mademoiselle Isabeau, in such a dry tone that the young man could not help looking at her, half surprised, half amused.

"Then I must have frightened you," said he, "I beg your pardon; another time I will try to come earlier, but to-day it was impossible."

"Edwin's, Mr. Wallson's, departure will add greatly to your cares, will it not?" asked Aunt Lore with interest.

“Naturally, a little; but fortunately, it is at the most convenient time for me.”

“I hope that you will come to see us often, though the Lindens have lost their charm. That dear little girl leaves a frightful gap behind her, and I do not understand how I have sometimes found her too noisy or too gay.”

“What pains me more than her absence,” added Mademoiselle Isabeau, “is the thought that she will return to us more savage and badly educated than ever.”

The young man laughed.

“To hear you, mademoiselle, one would think that Miss Maud had gone among the Indians.”

“The effect could not be more disastrous; when I think of the education that we have received, and the education of that child, I shiver.”

“But I do not see anything in her that is so extraordinary! she resembles all the young American girls of my acquaintance.”

“In that case I congratulate all young girls who are not Americans.”

“Is that your opinion, also, Mademoiselle Aimée?” asked the young man, laughingly.

The sweet face bent over her embroidery was slowly lifted, and her eyes met those fixed upon her.

“Mademoiselle Valrose’s opinion has no great value; every one knows that she admires Maud, even to her defects,” said Mademoiselle Isabeau, dryly.

"Because her defects come from her good qualities," answered Aimée, tranquilly.

"Explain yourself."

Aimée blushed.

"It seems to me that it is easy to explain her abruptness by the ardor of her feelings and her impressions; her freedom of language, by her frankness, and " —

"In order to be shocked at a bad education," interrupted the old maid, "one must have a superior one one's self; consequently, your opinion does not surprise me."

Aimée did not answer, and resumed her work quietly, while the young man nervously pulled his moustache. If Mademoiselle Isabeau had been a man, he would have shaken her, but with a white-haired old maid, one must at least keep a respectful and polite exterior.

He regretted having drawn upon Aimée the lady's indignation, and he would have liked to repair his error, and express his regret, but she did not raise her eyes, and her cheeks were still crimson.

The time passed painfully, conversation languished, and the hope that a fortunate chance would show him that she was not angry with him, diminished little by little, when a loud ring made them all start.

The instant after, the doctor's well-known voice was heard, and his jovial face appeared at the door.

"I want you, Estelle," said he, shaking the hands held out to him, one after the other; "Oh! you may look at me, Mademoiselle Aimée, I can resist your eyes, though

it is not easy. For to-day I do not need you;" and turning towards Mademoiselle Estelle, he explained in scientific terms the nature of the case for which he wished her aid; after which, he turned abruptly: "In heaven's name," cried he, "why do you shut yourselves up like this? One cannot breathe here."

"I thought it more prudent to shut everything all up until Mr. Wallson's return," replied Mademoiselle Isabeau.

"Is it your intention to suspend breathing until he returns? Do you not see that Mademoiselle Aimée is on the point of fainting? You will come with us," said he to the young girl, "the evening is magnificent. Ah! but Estelle will not come back — *Apropos*, Mr. Douay, I am going to spend one of these days at the factory. I have some one to recommend to you — but I believe you are going to faint also. Is it this departure for the New World which gives you all these weeping-willow airs?"

"Certainly," said Aunt Lore, in a tearful voice. "I do not know how we shall do without them."

"Well, in order to begin, I advise you not to bury yourselves alive, and to open your windows. Now, you must go and put on your hat, and take a little walk with Mademoiselle Aimée, who cannot come back alone."

"I?" cried the little lady, frightened; "I never go out in the evening."

"I will go with you, doctor, and bring back Mademoiselle Aimée."

"Ah! I had forgotten you," cried the physician, turn-

ing towards the young man. "Will you really take so much trouble?" added he mischievously.

At this moment Mademoiselle Estelle returned to the room.

"I am ready, doctor."

"I am not surprised to hear it, you have taken your time. Let us go; Mr. Douay, you go first, I am afraid you will lose your way."

The evening was indeed beautiful, though already a little cool. Millions of stars shone in the dark blue sky, and with their soft, clear light, tempered the profound darkness of the night.

The young people had gone in advance.

"I want your forgiveness," said the young man, as soon as they were far enough not to be overheard.

"My forgiveness? For what?"

"For having made you speak when you were wise enough to keep silent; I should have understood that you knew better than I what you ought to do."

"I have nothing to forgive," said Aimée, "I knew all the time that your intentions were good."

The blue eyes which sought to pierce the darkness shone with pleasure.

"Do you know what brought me this evening?"

"No, certainly not.

"A feeling of uneasiness. I have been haunted since yesterday by the idea that Miss Maud's departure would be followed by another. Am I right?"

"If you mean me, you are mistaken. I have promised Maud to wait for her a year even, if it is necessary."

At this moment the doctor's voice was heard.

"Are you crazy, Mr. Douay? One cannot follow you. We part here," added he, indicating a small house, whose windows were still illuminated. "Now, you will return like good children, and do not lose your way."

"Do not be afraid, doctor."

"Well, well, be quick. Come, Estelle, we are losing time."

"What will you do during Miss Maud's absence?" asked the young man, as they took once more the road which led to the Lindens.

"I shall not be in any need of distraction," answered Aimée, "and I do not think I shall lack occupation. In the first place, I shall have to amuse Mademoiselle Lore, who will feel Maud's absence most, and then I shall read and knit and walk, and, what else? And when I am at the end of my resources, I will beg Mademoiselle Isabeau to begin my education again."

"Do not recall my sins," said the young man, laughingly.

"It was not my intention, I assure you."

"Do you still go to St. Rock's" inquired he, recovering his gravity.

"Certainly, every day."

"How proud you must be of having civilized this savage!"

"I have not civilized him at all. That came of itself. I should be much prouder if I could render our evenings tolerable; just now, that is what distresses me most, for they are lengthening every day; and if all are to be like this evening, it is not encouraging. Before you came, not a word had been spoken."

"That was better than what happened later; acknowledge that you were sorry that I came to disturb your quiet; as for me, besides that thought, which was not agreeable, I really had a good mind to knock Mademoiselle Isabeau down, in order to teach her to measure her words and her conduct towards her neighbor."

"It is the same thing," said Aimée, laughing; "I did not regret that you came, it made a diversion, which was the main thing."

"You are very good to treat it so. I would come every evening if I could, though I fear that sort of diversion, myself; but, you know, our rooms are about to open, and I do not dare to leave my men entirely to themselves."

"I understand."

They were quite near the house, and instinctively slackened their steps.

"I should like to make a compact with you, Mademoiselle Aimée," said the young man, stopping suddenly.

"A compact!" repeated Aimée, a little surprised.

"I should like you, during Miss Maud's absence, to

take me for a confidant of your trials as well as of your pleasures; in a word, that you should depend on me only in case of any trouble or difficulty; I am not sure if you understand me?"

"I think so, thank you."

"You ought not to thank me, but just to promise."

Aimée raised her eyes towards the true face which bent over her, trying to pierce the darkness.

"I promise," said she, placing her hand in the one which he held out, — "at least, as far as lies in my power."

"I do not much like that reservation. I promise unreservedly, though you do not ask *my* promise, for a compact has no value, if it is only on one side."

"Naturally."

He kept silent, retaining her hand as if he had still more to say; then, releasing it suddenly, he contented himself with wishing her a simple good night, and let her go.

CHAPTER XXI.

SOME LETTERS.

AUTUMN had succeeded to summer, and winter to autumn, and Maud had not yet returned. Each of her letters, so impatiently waited for, brought fresh disappointment to the Lindens.

Mr. Wallson, who had had the joy of seeing his sister, and the consolation of soothing her last moments, seemed to wish to postpone his return indefinitely. His relatives and friends, he wrote, absolutely refused to hear his departure spoken of, and he was forced to give way.

And Maud, while appearing sincerely glad of her prospective return to Europe, did not seem to suffer much for the delay.

Aimée was sometimes tempted to believe herself forgotten, when a letter would come, so full of tenderness, where the young girl's heart throbbed in every line, and she was ashamed of having doubted her little companion's affection, even for a moment.

As for the Misses Vaudrai, they could find no words to express their just indignation, and shut themselves up in a solemn silence. Aunt Lore, alone, sometimes spoke with Aimée upon the forbidden subject; her heart

had too great need of sympathy to be able always to hide its pain.

On her part, the young girl did her best to cheer the three ladies, and to replace, in some measure, their precious, though thoughtless little niece.

Between her visits to St. Rock, her hours of conversation with Aunt Lore, her walks and readings, the days rolled away more quickly than Aimée had hoped; but she had enough to do make the evenings interesting. When she had played for Mademoiselle Isabeau's particular edification, two or three very sleepy sonatas, she sometimes proposed to read, which, regularly, put Aunt Estelle to sleep; then she shut her book, and tried to begin a conversation, which no one took the trouble to sustain. Her visits to St. Rock generally formed the topic. She had always something droll or interesting to tell about the old man, who was still to the three ladies a mysteriously wicked personage; but who had long since inspired her with compassion and interest.

Not that he had ceased to be rude and cross, his manner was the same, and he would have preferred to die rather than betray by a smile that the young girl's visits gave him pleasure, or that he could really do no longer without them.

Without losing for a moment his cross and contradictory manner, he teased her and compelled her to speak of all that interested her, the present, the past, and even the future.

He had long since become acquainted with all the places of her childhood; her life at the abbey, Aunt Martha, were as well known to him, as if he had lived there.

And then, there were her visits to the conservatories, which seemed to have no end, and from which Aimée always came home treasure-laden, — treasures which she generously shared with all.

There was only one day in the week when she did not go to St. Rock's. Upon Mademoiselle Isabeau's request, and perhaps, also, upon the request of another, Aimée remained at home on Sunday in order to receive their usual guest, who, since Mr. Wallson's departure, seemed to consider it a duty to come to the Lindens as frequently as his many duties permitted.

Sometimes, when he had the time, the young man went directly to St. Rock's, and waited near the gate until Aimée came out; then he accompanied her, through the park, by the longest paths, sometimes talking, sometimes silent, but never for an instant losing from his sight the sweet face upon which he liked to read the reflection of all her impressions.

He seemed to have assumed another duty also, that of remaining faithful to the compact which he had himself proposed. From that day, he had really taken Aimée for a confidant of all his projects for the future, of his cares as well as his hopes. To her he sometimes came to ask advice, he sought to interest her in all his life at the

factory ; he initiated her little by little in the task which he had assumed towards his workmen, a task difficult, and often rewarded by the ingratitude of the very ones whom he tried to aid.

As for Aimée, she acted as many women do ; she kept to herself the thousand little pains and worries of her daily life, as unworthy of another's notice, and gave all her sympathy and interest to the one who so often came to claim them.

It would have been egotism and ingratitude to refuse this sympathy, and Aimée was neither an egotist nor ungrateful.

While regretting the absence of her little companion, she was happy to be useful and necessary, not only to the friend whom she learned to love and esteem more and more, but also to Aunt Lore, whose brow cleared and whose eyes brightened whenever she saw her return from St. Rock's. And had she not there, also, a new cause of joy and gratitude ? Did she not see this strange and taciturn old man slowly awaking from his long stupor, and recovering some enjoyment in life ?

Thus Aimée, gay and careless, followed the flowery path of her new existence, without a care for the morrow, without a thought of the future, never asking herself where she was going, closing her eyes except to the happy present.

One morning, when as usual, she was seated by Aunt Lore's side, to whom she was reading, while the other

ladies, near the chimney, did their best to do nothing, the servant entered with the letters.

“A letter from Edwin!” cried Mademoiselle Isabeau. “Let us see if he announces his return. There is one for you, also, Aimée, from Maud.”

The young girl rose quickly to take possession of the precious missive.

Their departure was decided, Maud wrote, and their places already taken upon the vessel; in two weeks, or three at most, they would be back again, at which she rejoiced with all her heart, even while it cost her much to leave her many friends; but the prospect of having Aimée was a great consolation. She should have so many things to tell her, that the days would not be long enough. And then — and then she would have a secret to confide to her, a secret nearly as old as herself, and which was called — and here followed a name which Aimée could hardly decipher. After the reading of this letter, which from beginning to end breathed of perfect happiness, Aimée remained lost in thought.

During this time, the ladies had read by turns their brother-in-law's letter.

“Is it not unheard of, Dolores?” murmured Mademoiselle Isabeau, as the former replaced the letter in its envelope without saying anything.

“I do not know,” answered Aunt Lore, with a thoughtful air, “perhaps we ought to have expected it, but she seemed such a child.”

Aimée raised her head.

"It is more than unheard of, it is indecent," resumed Mademoiselle Isabeau; "who would have believed that badly brought up little girl, with her babyish ways, entertained such feelings? At her age, and later still, my doll was the sole object of my tenderness, my entire pre-occupation; I only abandoned it to take charge of our little sister, is it not so, Estelle?"

"Certainly, my dear, I remember that it was the same with me; at Maud's age we were as pure, as innocent as new-born babes."

Aunt Lore added nothing; perhaps her memory recalled that, at her niece's age she had been guilty of a similar transgression.

"Edwin has never had any common sense," resumed Mademoiselle Isabeau; "ought he not to point out to his daughter the absurdity of such an inclination? Only a rich merchant!"

"But," suggested Aunt Lore, "Edwin was only a rich merchant himself when he married our sister."

"The circumstances were very different; Edwin had his colossal fortune, and his reputation as a foreigner. The Douays have not even that advantage, and I doubt if they are as rich as they say."

"It is really shameful," added Mademoiselle Estelle; "if we had only guessed something when Edwin sought a partner, we would have used all our influence then to have dissuaded him."

"You forgot that then he was also ignorant of Maud's feelings; does he not say himself how surprised and amused he was when she opened her heart to him, and told him that her interest in the factory was only a pretext."

"To dissimulate to such a degree, at such an age, passes my comprehension," sighed Mademoiselle Estelle.

At this moment Aimée rose noiselessly, and left the parlor. With a quiet, almost a slow step, she reached her room, then, like one who acts unconsciously, she first approached the table, touched absently the different objects upon it, went to look through the window, and, at last, seated herself in the darkest corner of the apartment.

Her head thrown back, her lips colorless, her eyes wide open, the poor child saw with agony the end of all her hopes. The veil which had covered her eyes had been abruptly torn away. How had she been able to forget her tutor's warnings, how had she not seen the danger in front of her, how had she thus deceived herself? She pushed back her hair from her forehead, as if unable to bear its weight, her hands pressed themselves together convulsively. What should she do? What would become of her? Would she have the courage to tear this feeling from her heart? Would she be strong enough to fly, to condemn herself to a frightful solitude for ten, twenty, thirty years, who could tell, perhaps more? She closed her eyes, as if

to escape the horrible vision. And if it was too late, if he — she dared not continue her thought, but a flash of joy shone in her eyes.

All at once, a cry of horror escaped from her lips, she rose quickly, and, pressing her two hands to her burning brow, she began to pace her room, as if she wished to fly from herself. Yes, for an instant she had forgotten another's suffering, to sacrifice another to her own happiness, and that other was the child who had shown her such tenderness, and had made her life bright and happy.

She covered her face and moaned. Oh! who would help her? Who would give her strength? From the depths of this abyss the poor child lifted passionate hands heavenward, then sank down by her bed and hid her face.

Long she remained thus, tearless, motionless. Tears are not permitted to the one who fights, — the one to whom comes the victory. Later, when the victory comes, then, rising again, broken and bruised, he can weep; his tears will do good, and soothe his sorrow.

When Aimée rose, pale with fatigue and suffering, she was resolute. Maud should never have cause to doubt her, never; for the love of her she would be the same, she would laugh and be happy. Her beautiful eyes shone with a new light, the light that love gives, — the sacrifice of one's self.

And if — but no, God would not permit such a sorrow.

How had she been able to imagine for a moment that he had other than simple friendship for her? Was he not good and aimable with every one? To him that was as natural as for others to be coarse and rude. No, it was not surprising that he had come to the Lindens less often than formerly; it was not surprising that, when he came, he had sought her more, Maud being no longer there. Besides, had he ever spoken of anything except his projects for the future in the factory; and with his workmen? No, fortunately, no, and with clasped hands, she thanked God.

Maud should never know of the bitter sorrow which filled her heart at this moment. Maud, her little Maud, would be happy; this affection as old as herself would one day be returned, if it was not already. As for her—no, she would not think of herself, she would live from day to day, hour by hour, her hand in the Hand of the One who had led Aunt Martha, who would lead her also, and who would bring them together again soon. O yes! she hoped that it would be soon.

At this moment the first breakfast bell was heard.

Aimée pressed her hand to her brow, as if she felt keen pain, then she began her toilette feverishly.

“Good heavens! what is the matter with you?” cried Mademoiselle Estelle, as she entered the dining-room.

“It is nothing,” she answered, “I have a headache.”

“But, my dear, you look dreadfully, you must go to bed; I will send for the doctor.”

"Thank you, that is not necessary; perhaps I shall see him this afternoon at St. Rock's."

"But you cannot go out in this condition."

"I think it would do me good."

"Perhaps," suggested Aunt Lore, "it would be better to rest now. Come, my child, I will arrange a compress of my aromatic vinegar."

Aimée gave way, and remained quiet, lying on her bed, trying not to think, until the time came when she was in the habit of going to St. Rock's.

As she entered the forest, a doubt crossed her mind. Was it possible that one night, only one night had passed since she had last crossed the park? She looked around her — no, nothing was changed; as on the previous day, the trees were bare, the leaves covered the paths, and rustled beneath her tread. She only was not the same, she had grown old. What should she do, in order to appear gay, to amuse the old man, and speak of a thousand things which had now lost their interest? It is so difficult to laugh when the heart is breaking.

The two friends awaited her in the elegant and comfortable apartment which served as library and smoking room.

"You are a good two minutes late," cried the doctor, as she made her appearance. "St. Rock was already speaking of putting on his coat, to go and look for you, and bring you, dead or alive."

"Hush, you old chatterbox," retorted the old man,

"you have never told anything but fibs all your life. Will you come and see the conservatories," added he, turning towards Aimée, "I have several new things to show you, their toilette has taken me all the morning."

The visit was long and tedious; the old man stopped by each plant, and made the young girl do the same, examining it with him in all its details.

"Now, they are going to give you their reward," said he, taking a scissors; "you know when a baby has been very good, even though he has not heard a word of his lesson, one ought to encourage him."

Aimée smiled.

"That is enough," said she, "do not cut any more."

"Why, the baby is good indeed to-day! What is the matter? Are you ill?" he asked suddenly, handing her some superb roses.

"Only a little headache."

"Why did you not say so? This air is not good for you. Come out of it at once. I will have some tea made for you, since you like it."

"Have you a remedy for the headache, Bayard?" cried the old man, approaching the house.

"It is nothing," said Aimée, "it was not worth while to speak of it."

"Physicians are idiots," said he, preceding the young girl into the library.

"Why?" asked the doctor, who had remained comfortably installed before the fire.

"Why? Here I have been asking you for an hour for a remedy for the headache, and you pretend to be asleep, so as not to avow your ignorance."

"I have heard nothing; have you a headache? That is something new."

"I?" the old man made a disdainful grimace. "No, she has; come, sit here in this arm-chair, you will be more comfortable."

"I know only one remedy for the headache," said the physician; "it is patience. Is your head very bad, Mademoiselle Aimée?"

"Yes, but I can bear it." She took the tea which was brought her, then, feeling herself suddenly strengthened, she began to talk feverishly.

"What will you do," roughly asked her old friend, "when you leave the Lindens?"

The blood mounted to the young girl's cheeks.

"I shall go home," she replied.

"And you will live on what?"

"On my money. Aunt Martha did not leave me much, but enough, all the same, for me to give a little to those poorer than I am."

The old man smiled mischievously, and looked at the doctor out of the corner of one eye.

"All that," said he, "is very fine and very good; it is like those horrible ruins one admires in a picture, but one would not live in them for anything in the world. It will be less agreeable when you are there, when, instead

of riding in a carriage, you will be tired with walking, and, instead of ordering, you will be forced to wait on yourself."

Aimée looked at the old man a little strangely.

"I do not understand why you tell me that, since one cannot change anything. Whether I will or not, I must submit; but," added she, more gayly, "I shall always have this poor consolation, I shall see others more to be pitied than myself."

"You are a philosopher."

"Oh! no, philosophy is the least of my defects."

"Which is the greatest?"

"I do not know," she pressed her hand to her forehead, "perhaps Mademoiselle Isabeau could tell you."

"Do you hear, Bayard, you shall go and ask her; but no, he does not hear, he is in a brown study watching the fire."

Without knowing it, the old man was right, the doctor was dreaming. "We are all the same," he thought; "it matters not what age. We let ourselves be captivated by a pair of beautiful eyes, and the sound of a sweet voice; and hers is particularly sweet. And he cannot see himself, he does not feel his thistle stings become soft as fur. It does me good to hear him laugh, and to see his face become a little smoother every day. What a strange thing life is! And to what is this change due? Some would say to Providence; others, chance; and I say to a pair of spectacles."

The door opened, and a servant entered, and silently laid a letter upon the table.

"Give it to me," said the doctor, holding out his hand.

"It is for Mr. St. Rock."

"For me?" cried the old man, frowning terribly.

"What can it mean? Where does it come from?"

"It has a Swiss stamp."

During this time, Aimée had put on her wraps, happy in this diversion, which enabled her to take leave earlier than usual.

As soon as they were alone, the old man, still in an uncertain manner, tore open the envelope, and began to read, while the doctor, as astonished as he, watched him. All at once he pushed back his arm-chair, and sprang towards his friend.

"What is the matter with you?" cried he. "St. Rock, are you dying? St. Rock, answer me!"

For all answer, the old man pressed his hand to his throat and fell.

The doctor had just the time to break his fall, then, quick as a flash, tore off his cravat; for to the dark-red hue, so suddenly spread over his face, a frightful pallor had succeeded.

"His heart is still beating," murmured the poor doctor, whose hands trembled convulsively, and, with this ray of hope, his presence of mind returned to him, he rushed to the door, and called all the servants at once.

Some moments later, the sick man, still unconscious, was carried to his room, where for a long time, they vainly tried to restore him to consciousness. Many hours passed before the doctor dared to leave his friend's bedside. And it was with a bent head and anxious look that he reëntered the library, the door of which he had taken care to leave half open ; then picking up the letter that the old man had dropped, he examined the signature with minute care, and began to read. But his face, which at first expressed only trouble and indifference, soon betrayed his interest ; his breath grew quick, he did not read, he devoured it. And, all at once, a keen emotion lit up his face.

"She!" murmured he ; "She! Good heavens, how strange!"

He rose abruptly, and passed his hand several times across his eyes and forehead.

"Ah! am I so weak? I, too? Miserable woman, she would have killed us all with the same blow. And she thought she was doing her duty, she had promised, sworn ; but ought she not to have known better, ought she not to have known the good that existed under that terrible mask!" Then, changing his tone, "Poor little thing," murmured he, "how she must have suffered, how frightened she must have been, in order to exact such a promise!"

He seated himself.

"All this is very strange, very incredible, and yet, it

seems to me now, that I have always known it. Man is a queer animal, he only needs a few moments to accustom him to the most extraordinary, the most thrilling news — when it does not kill one instantly. Poor, poor St. Rock, she has deprived him of twenty years of happiness, and she tells him before she dies, and she hopes to go to heaven. Oh! if there was any justice!”

He hurried from the room.

“St. Rock,” murmured he, approaching the old man, softly.

There was no movement.

The physician looked around him despairingly. What should he do to bring back a ray to that dull eye, a light of recognition to that impassive countenance?

A sudden thought came to him, he turned quickly towards the valet.

“Do not leave him for a moment,” said he, “give him his medicine every quarter of an hour, do you hear? That spark of life must not be quenched.”

“You are obliged to go out, sir?”

“Yes, but I am coming back. St. Rock, I am coming back, coming back with her. St. Rock, it is worth while to live now.”

Only the light movement of the coverings, which indicated that he still breathed, was the answer to these words. The doctor seemed to hesitate a moment, then, taking his hat, he hurried from the house as quickly as possible,

CHAPTER XXII.

DEATH OF ST. ROCK.

"YOUR walk has not done you much good," said Aunt Lore, as Aimée entered the parlor, "I see that you are as ill as ever."

"It will pass away to-night," added Mademoiselle Estelle, "only sleep will cure sick headaches."

Aimée seated herself in her usual place, without having the courage to speak.

"I have never seen you look so badly," continued Mademoiselle Estelle, "I should not be surprised if this headache were the precursor of some serious illness; your eyes have such dark rings around them that it looks as if you had on glasses."

Aimée was about to answer when the door opened, and Mr. Douay was announced.

The poor child's heart beat as if it would burst, and she moved quickly from the light.

"Are you ill?" asked the young man, taking the hand which she extended to him.

"No, thank you."

He looked at her, and his bright smile vanished, but he said nothing more, and took his place in an arm-chair, from which he could watch her every movement,

"What have you thought of the news?" asked he; "I have left my men expressly to come and talk it over."

"Oh! you know it, too?" cried Aunt Lore; "is it not delightful to think that in two or three weeks, at most, they will be back?"

Aimée had quickly taken a piece of embroidery, and worked at it with feverish energy, not daring to raise her eyes, for fear of meeting those fixed upon her.

It was the first time that the young man had seen that sad expression, and that persistent avoidance of his look. What could have happened? Only yesterday he had seen her smile, — that sunny smile that he loved so dearly; he had seen those limpid eyes raised to his with even more than confidence. Could she be ill? Her beautiful face changed color every moment. Had she any trouble? Who would have dared to trouble her? "If I ask her to go out, perhaps she would tell me, — but no, it is impossible; the night is as black as a furnace and it is snowing besides." He rose and came to lean upon the back of her chair.

"You are terribly busy this evening."

Aimée raised her eyes, and tried to smile.

"I need to count all the time," said she, "without that I make mistakes."

"Then lay your work aside, or are you in a hurry about it?"

"Oh, no, it is some embroidery on which Maud has been at work for years."

"It seemed to me that I recognized it," said the young man, laughing. "Leave that old thing; Miss Maud can finish it herself."

He took it out of her hands, and saw that she was trembling.

"Are you cold?" he cried, growing serious. "Come over to the fire."

Aimée obeyed.

"Are you ill?" he murmured, almost in her ear.

She made a negative sign. "Only a little headache."

"You remember our compact, you promised," added he, in a low voice.

She raised a troubled face to his.

"I said if it was in my power."

"And it is not in your power?"

She shook her head. He remained silent, motionless, looking at, but not seeing the brilliant fire which burned on the hearth, and feeling, for the first time, something bitter in his heart. Why had she secrets which she could not confide to him? He had none; he would tell her anything, one thing excepted, and that he had decided to tell her at once, as soon as he was sure—but now, he was no longer sure, she seemed to avoid looking at him, and, even in speaking, seemed embarrassed and uneasy.

At that instant the doctor's well-known voice was heard, and the door opened to admit him; but at the sight of him, every one uttered an exclamation,

"Doctor, what has happened? You are in trouble."

Without answering, he looked around him, and went straight to Aimée, who had risen, and looked at him in surprise.

"Come," said he, taking her hand, "he is very ill; you must come at once."

Aimée uttered a cry, and hurried out of the room.

"Wrap up warmly," cried Aunt Lore;—"how did it happen, doctor?"

"Almost immediately after she left."

"Is it an attack?"

"I do not know, it looks like it."

"I do not see what good Aimée's presence can do," murmured Mademoiselle Isabeau.

"In any case, no harm," answered the doctor, dryly; "I should not have come after her, if I had not thought it necessary."

At this moment, the young girl came back, made her adieu in haste, and hurried off, followed by the physician; but hardly had they left the house, when he checked her

"Do not walk so fast, it is useless. I have something to tell you that you ought to know before you reach him; take my arm, and listen to me, if you can, without interrupting me. It is his history which I am going to tell you. You already know that he has not always lived here. He lived in the north of France, like myself. Our acquaintance dates from babyhood, and

our friendship, which had its birth on the benches of the infant school, has never changed. Later, we were at the same college, and afterwards, for several years, at the same university. But as St. Rock needed no profession, he returned to his estate and married, while I took my diploma as a physician, and came to establish myself here. One fine day, nearly three years after his marriage, I received a letter inviting me to his house, to act as godfather to his first child; but before I had the time to make my preparations for going, a telegram brought me the news that my friend was a widower, and his son motherless.

“But I must cut short my story. I have no time to speak of his grief; the best proof that it was real is, that he has never thought of marrying again. He had only one thought, one tenderness, and that was his little Bayard, whom he had confided to a young Swiss girl, then in service at his house. The boy grew up, became beautiful like his mother; he had her eyes and hair. As for the rest, it was his father over again, the same iron will, the same quickness, the same generosity.

“All went well for years. St. Rock saw nothing good or beautiful under the sun except his boy, and sincerely believed that the whole world had not such another. He did his best to spoil him, and every one in the house did the same, including the Swiss girl, who would have liked to treat him as a baby all his life.

“I saw him often, I believe I told you that I was his

godfather, and you must know, then, that I adored him like every one else. And he was, indeed, lovable, with his lordly airs, and his goodness towards every one. In short, their home was a true paradise, and a pair of eyes was sufficient to turn it into a hell. St Rock, naturally, dreamed of a marriage for his son, a marriage worthy of him; that is to say, worthy of a prince, though he had no title of nobility, nothing except an ancient name, and an immense fortune. He searched the country, went right and left, and searched so well, that at last he found one whom he thought worthy to make his son happy, and proudly came back to tell him of his discovery. Bayard listened to him tranquilly, then, as tranquilly, told him that he had loved for years a young orphan girl, a simple governess at the house of one of his friends. To tell you of the terrible scenes which passed then between the father and son would be to waste our time; the boy held his own, proving himself his father's son. No threats or prayers, supplications or entreaties, could shake him.

“St. Rock only saw the young girl once, but it appears that he gave way before her to such terrible violence, that, from that time, and for all her life, which was not long, the poor child could not hear her father-in-law spoken of without trembling and turning pale. Nevertheless, her terror was not as strong as her love for his son, for she let herself be persuaded into marrying him, in spite of all the maledictions of the old man.

"When St. Rock saw that his son's decision was taken, he sent him some thousand francs, which his mother had brought him at their marriage, and begged him to understand that he had a father no longer. Bayard tried to change him, but it was in vain. Poor St. Rock, he has been heavily punished for that moment of hardness.

"The Swiss nurse, had, naturally, done as all women would do, she had taken up the cause of the lovers, whom she followed and served until the time of their death. The poor father, he could not guess what would happen. His intentions were not, as he has often told me, to banish his son forever. He hoped that the need of money would bring him one day, and then he meant to show himself good and generous. That day never came. Bayard died almost suddenly, of an affection of the heart, which left no time for a reconciliation with his father. When St. Rock arrived, all was over. It was then that he committed, in my opinion, his greatest fault. He refused to see his daughter-in-law, whom he regarded as the cause of all his sorrow, and returned home, where he remained one or two years, before deciding to come and live near me, in order to lead the life with which you are familiar."

"Is she still living?" murmured Aimée, in a choked voice.

"No, she died a few months after her husband, at Silveréal."

“At Silveréal?”

“Yes; but listen to me carefully now, without interrupting me. St. Rock received this evening a letter. I do not know how to tell you that—a letter which tells him that his daughter-in-law died after having given birth to a child, of whose existence he has never heard until to-day.”

“How strange!”

“Do not say anything, listen to me quietly. The poor creature, feeling, it appears, that she was going to die, made the Swiss nurse, who had never left her since her husband’s death, promise to hide the birth of this infant from her father-in-law, certain that it would inherit the hatred he had for her. I do not remember how she arranged it, though the letter recounts it fully; in short, she resolved to expose the child, and did it in such a fashion that it was found and taken by an honest woman, named Martha Valrose.

“There, there, be brave, don’t tremble so; do you wish to rest a moment?”

“No, no, let us go quickly. Is he very ill?”

“I am afraid so, the blow was too unexpected, and it crushed him; but perhaps when he sees you, he will rally, but, just as likely, he may sink at once.”

Feeling as though she were in a dream, Aimée quickened her steps; she did not feel the bitter cold, nor the icy wind which swept her face. She knew only one thing,—this old man, who was dying, was the only one

on earth who belonged to her; she never thought of his injustice and cruelty, she only remembered his long silence, his long loneliness.

She had let go the doctor's arm, and walked at his side with rapid and unequal steps.

"Are you sure that he will not be angry when he sees me?" asked she, as they crossed the threshold.

For all answer, the physician took her hand, and drew her towards the old man's room.

"Try to be calm; try not to tremble," said he in a low voice, as they entered.

Aimée followed him upon tiptoe to the old man's bed.

"St. Rock," murmured the doctor, "she is here, she will stay with you, she will never leave you again."

Something like a sob rose in the young girl's throat; she knelt down by the bed, and put her hand in the old man's. He opened his eyes, fixed them for several seconds upon the young face bent so compassionately over his, and a feeble smile came to his lips; then his eyes wandered round the room, and his lips moved.

The physician approached the bed quickly.

"St. Rock, you recognize us do you not? She is here, near you; she will never go away any more."

For all answer, the sick man slowly raised his hand, and laid it for an instant upon the young girl's bent head.

"You will take care of her," murmured he.

“Do not say such a thing, St. Rock; you will recover, you will live.”

Aimée sobbed, still holding his hand, which, from time to time responded with a feeble pressure to her caresses and kisses.

All at once the sick man's face changed.

“Too late,” murmured he, “no pardon — too great a sinner” —

A passionate sob answered his words, then the voice of the young girl rose in the silence of the night, and from the depths of her heart, she sent heavenward an ardent supplication.

The dying man opened his eyes, seemed to listen, and then slowly crossed his hands upon his breast, and lay motionless, while his poor soul, borne upon the wings of prayer, appeared before its Judge.

The day was beginning to break when Aimée moved away from the bed where rested the body of this strange old man, to whom, at the close of his life, she had been able to bring a little happiness.

She left the room noiselessly, for fear of awaking the doctor, who had dropped asleep, and slipped like a shadow along the corridors, and down the stairway.

The icy morning air seemed to recall her to herself. She threw a desolate glance around her, as the memory of these past months returned to her. Oh! if she had known, if she had guessed! But she had known nothing,

and it was too late; too late for him, too late for her. A keen pain filled her heart, she quickened her steps, as if to escape these assailing thoughts.

She saw nothing; the thick curtain of clouds covering the sky seemed to cover everything. All was dark around her, sombre and icy; her heart seemed like a stone, and her poor head a chaos that no ray could illumine.

She had entered the forest, and walked with bent head, so preoccupied and so sad, that she neither saw nor heard a slender figure which advanced to meet her.

“Mademoiselle Aimée!”

The young director of the factory was near her, and looked at her with a singular mixture of joy and pain.

“I have been waiting for you a long time,” said he, “I could not rest until I had seen you. You were so strange yesterday, so unlike yourself, that it has kept me awake all night. Will you not tell me why you were so sad?”

Aimée raised to him a look from which all joy had fled.

“He is dead,” she answered; and, covering her face with her hands, she began to sob.

The young man remained an instant motionless with surprise; he did not expect such news, nor such a burst of grief.

“Do not cry,” murmured he, “it pains me to see you so sad;” he touched her shoulder lightly, then, growing bolder, he took one of her hands and kept it in his.

“I wish I could comfort you,” said he; “I should like

to share all your pain, all your sorrow, — will you not let me? You know that I love you, not since yesterday, nor since to-day, but since the first day that you came to the Lindens. Do you hear me, Aimée?”

The young girl's tears were suddenly checked; she listened motionless, stupefied, her eyes fixed upon those which regarded her so ardently, listened to these strange words, whose sense she seemed unable to comprehend.

The young man's face changed; the beautiful face raised to his expressed neither joy nor the sweet confusion which seems to acknowledge a similar confession.

Aimée's lips trembled convulsively.

“Did you say that you loved me?” she murmured.

“Did you not know it? Have you not seen it long ago, Aimée, my” —

She interrupted him abruptly.

“Do not say anything more, do not add a word, I beg of you.”

“But, Aimée, you do not know” —

“No, I wish to know nothing, hear nothing; it would be a crime, treason; let me go.”

And drawing her hand from his, she hurried away.

“Aimée, listen to me, I have something more to tell you; it was I who” —

But she had already disappeared in the depths of the forest.

The young man took a step forward to follow her,

then, checking himself, he leaned against a tree, and, taking off his hat, passed his hand through his hair.

“A crime,” murmured he, “treason? toward whom? — Oh! I understand,” — he smiled bitterly, — “I am too late, she has already given what I asked for, and I, who thought I had the first right” —

He laughed aloud, and resumed his walk. When he reached the factory, all the workmen were busy; he went through the rooms, looking neither to right or left, addressing no word to any one, not even smiling at the army of children, who were already busy like industrious ants.

Perceiving his pale face, and gloomy looks, each of the workmen drew respectfully aside, and asked themselves what could have darkened that young face, usually so bright and happy.

“The master has received bad news.” Such was the report which soon spread itself over the factory, and this report was soon confirmed by old Caton’s grandson, who, in the course of the day, confided to his comrades that the master had not touched his dinner.

Aimée had pursued her homeward course, without even stopping to take breath; she had gained her room, and, still breathless, she remained motionless in the middle of that elegant little apartment, as if she were afraid to move, for fear of releasing some impetuous torrent around her.

Her beautiful eyes, darkened by despair, seemed fixed as if upon some horrible vision. One thought only filled her heart; she remembered no more past days, nor her dreams of happiness; she thought no more of that name, so ardently longed for, and so uselessly recovered; she had forgotten the old man, her grandfather, found and lost the same day. She only saw, far away, a little face with large black eyes, which looked sadly at her, and begged her to restore her what she had taken away, the one she had loved from her childhood, without whom she could not live. At that moment, the door opened softly.

“My poor little girl, how dreadfully you look!”

And Aunt Lore put her arm around her waist, and kissed her tenderly.

“He is dead!” sobbed Aimée; “I have no one now on earth, no one” —

“Hush, hush, my dear child, how can you say that, at the moment when Edwin, Mr. Wallson, and Maud are coming back?”

Aimée looked at her entreatingly. “You will let me go, will you not, Aunt Lore?” and she clasped her hands to give force to her pleading. “Oh! I beg you, let me go away to-day, to-morrow, if you love me!”

“But, Aimée, how can you speak so? Go away when Maud is coming back! It would be the blackest ingratitude.”

“No, Aunt Lore, I assure you not; it is because I love

her that I want to go ; because I love her, — oh ! with my whole heart, more than myself ! ”

She pressed her handkerchief to her lips, as if to check the words which were about to escape her.

Mademoiselle Lore was in consternation. That night of watching, the grief caused by the death of her old friend, had certainly affected the young girl’s mind. She took her hand.

“ Will you do me a favor, Aimée ? ”

“ O yes ! if I can, I will. ”

“ Go to bed at once, while I get something for you to eat ; I am sure that you have taken nothing since yesterday, and you are beside yourself with fatigue. Will you do as I ask you ? ”

“ I will try. ”

“ That is well, my child ; I will go down now to see what I can send you. I will come back soon. ”

When she reappeared, Mademoiselle Lore found Aimée lying upon her bed half dressed, by her side a tray which she had hardly touched. The little lady approached carefully, and, seeing that she did not move, noiselessly withdrew, happy in the good result of her advice. The day wore away, and after each of her visits, Aunt Lore went away with a lighter heart. The young girl continued her peaceful slumber. When night came, she sat up, and pushed back her long hair.

The door opened once more, and the benevolent face of Aunt Lore smiled at the young girl.

"You are awake, my child. I hope that your long sleep has done you good."

"Thank you."

"Will you not come down for dinner? It will give me so much pleasure."

"Oh! please, not this evening."

"Well, well, my child, there is no hurry; you will be still better to-morrow. Meanwhile, I will send you some dinner."

As soon as she was alone, Aimée rose, wrapped herself in a shawl, and seated herself upon her little sofa.

What a day! She could never forget it. She leaned her weary head upon her clasped hands, and became absorbed in her thoughts, when the noise of steps and voices made her start. In a moment, the doctor appeared, followed by Mademoiselle Estelle.

He approached the young girl, and took her hand warmly, but without his usual gay smile.

"I thought of coming during the day," said he, "but so many things have prevented, that, if it had not been for Aunt Estelle's note, I should have waited until to-morrow. How do you feel this evening?"

"Thank you."

"That is no answer. Give me your hand. It is like ice; at least, you have no fever. And your headache?"

"I have it still, a little."

"Well, very well; you need have no fear, Estelle. I

will stay a moment with our patient, while you can finish your dinner quietly."

Mademoiselle Estelle understood that she was dismissed, and quitted the room with dignity.

"You have passed a sad day," said the physician, "I see it in your eyes. See, I have brought you" —

But before he could finish, Aimée had put her hand on his arm, and with a pleading accent said, —

"Doctor, promise me that you will aid me to leave the Lindens?"

The physician looked at her in astonishment.

"Leave this house? Why?"

"I do not know. Oh! perhaps I know, but I cannot tell; promise me, doctor; I am ill, do you not see it? If you will not help me, I must run away. Tell me that you will help me."

The physician seemed perplexed, and for some seconds looked closely at the pale face with the pleading eyes resting upon him.

"If I could understand your desire," said he, at last.

Aimée pressed her hand to her forehead.

"I am so unhappy, so ill; do you not see that it would be better for me to return for a few months, at least? When I am better, later, we will see. Promise me that you will tell them to let me go, tell them that it is wrong to try to prevent me; they do not understand," cried she, with agitation, "how wrong it is to force me to stay when I am sad and unhappy."

The doctor rose, took a few steps across the room, then returned to Aimée, who had anxiously watched his movements.

"I did not think," said he, "that this would affect you thus; but since it is so, I believe that you are right, some weeks of rest and absolute change will entirely restore you. I will arrange it, you need have no anxiety."

"You are certain, doctor?"

"Perfectly certain that in one or two days, I will accompany you to the station."

A sigh of relief rose to Aimée's lips.

"Thank you, doctor."

He took the little hand which she extended, and pressed it silently.

"Now," said he, "I am going to show you what I brought for you." And he drew from his pocket a large envelope upon which Aimée read the words, "To my friend, Bayard."

"Take it, read it," said the physician, placing the sheet before her. "Was he not a noble man? See, he has forgotten nothing, neither the infirmary nor the factory, nor the poor, who did not much like him, nor yourself; look further."

"I?" And Aimée opened her great sad eyes. "How could he? He did not know then?"

"No, he knew nothing, but that did not prevent him from having a liking for you, and from appreciating,

though it did not look like it, what you did for him. He asked himself once, how he could, without wounding you, thank you, and show you his affection; he was full of delicacy, with all his bearish manners. Now, calm yourself, and listen to me for a moment; this paper has no value, now."

"Why?"

"Because you are the legitimate heiress of all his property. As soon as I shall have succeeded in having you recognized as his grandchild, this will be useless, valueless, and everything will be yours."

"What does he give you, doctor?"

"Did you not see? Not much money, but he leaves me some property, which is yours, like the rest."

Aimée did not seem to have heard. "Can you," said she, after a moment of silence, "have me recognized as his grandchild, without betraying his conduct towards my father and mother?"

How strange these words seemed, sad and sweet at the same time!

"No, that is impossible, but that ought not to trouble you. I will leave for Switzerland to-morrow, where I hope to find the wretched woman who has kept you apart."

Aimée stopped him; "You know," said she, "that this woman was bound by a promise; we must not forget it. She thought to fulfil a sacred duty, and she has acted faithfully. I have no reason to complain, the years of

my childhood were very happy ones." She checked herself, but resumed immediately, in a low voice, "Formerly, and even lately, I have greatly wished to know my real name; now, my desire is granted, but, if I must bear that name at the cost of his stained reputation, and of having his past life criticised, judged, and condemned, I prefer to renounce it. Why," she added, sadly, "should I draw all this blame upon the only one of my kindred that I have known and loved; I care nothing for his fortune, I am more than rich with what he gives me, and later, when you are old and infirm, I will come to you, and care for you, if you wish it."

She looked at him and tried to smile.

"Well, well," said the physician, rising quickly, "I must go, I will come back to-morrow."

Long after his departure, Aimée remained in the same place, her head bent upon her hands, seeing in her thoughts the place where she had passed her joyous childhood, to which she was about to return, and where, in all probability, she would end her days.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RETURN TO THE ABBEY.

THE abbey was once more open, wide open, doors and windows, and, as formerly, the sunshine streamed into the rooms so long dark and deserted. An active little old woman, with disordered hair, a handkerchief upon her head, came and went busily, sweeping, rubbing, brushing, never relaxing her efforts until the floors shone with cleanliness.

"If you had let me know that you were coming back, Mademoiselle Aimée," said she, suddenly, "all would have been ready, and you would not have had the worry of seeing it, and of helping me. It is not fit work for you at all, and it worries me to see you sweep, with your white hands."

Aimée smiled.

"You had better principles, formerly, Aunt Rose! you told me then, that work, and work only, would drive away worry."

"And I say so still; only I should like to see you do something else, pay visits, for instance; everybody will be glad to see you again, though one can hardly recognize you."

"Am I then so changed?"

The little old woman approached the young girl, and her sharp eyes examined her from head to foot.

“It is not so much your face,” said she, shaking her head, “though you are much thinner and paler than formerly; it is not your dress; it is something in your manner which doesn’t belong to this place. I think that you are what they call a fine lady, but perhaps that will pass away.”

“I hope so,” sighed Aimée, who involuntarily thought of the happy time when the abbey sufficed for her happiness. Then, like Aunt Martha, she went to work, trying to forget herself, trying not to think, —

The winter was just closing, and in this corner of the earth where its wings hardly touch, nature had already begun to awake. Two weeks, which seemed like years, had passed since Aimée’s return. Two weeks, and she was already so weary, and her path seemed to lose itself in a far-away gloom, which her eyes could not pierce. Nevertheless, she would not give up, she wished to go forward bravely, never stopping, never looking backward, until the master’s voice said, “It is enough.”

She tried to work, to employ her time well and faithfully; she wished to be good, she even tried to be gay; she tried to occupy herself with others, never thinking of herself, never looking forward, forgetting the past, serving God, and living for him alone! But there were moments, when, in spite of herself, her strength failed her, when she felt herself so tired, when she would have

wished for the end, when this long solitude frightened her — when she rebelled.

Was it then of no avail that her heart throbbed in her bosom? of no avail all its treasures of affection? But, no, it was not so, Maud would feel it some day, when her old and faithful love had been returned: no, it was not a useless sacrifice, Maud would be happy, and she, — she would try to rejoice, to forget herself, to regret nothing, and if that could not be, no one would know it, save Him to whom she could tell all, her pain as well as her weakness, her regrets as well as her follies.

The night came; Aimée, leaning against the little garden gate, lingered a moment before entering. She looked thoughtfully at the little cottage at the edge of the forest, and tried to represent to herself what her life would have been had her young mother lived.

But, suddenly, Aunt Martha's last words returned to her: "When you are sad, remember that you were my only consolation, my best joy, and that thought will drive away grief."

Aunt Martha had spoken truly, Aimée felt it now, and her heart swelled with gratitude. It is so sweet to have given a little happiness to those who have given us everything.

"Mademoiselle Aimée, it is night, you had better come in," cried Aunt Rose's voice, suddenly. Aimée made a movement, and stopped, motionless with sur-

prise. Some one was slowly approaching along the path which led to the abbey.

Who could that visitor be? Was it the doctor? No, the one who drew near was much taller and more slender than the little physician. Doubt, fear, and hope filled her heart at the same time, and kept her motionless where she stood.

The traveller approached, he was at her side, and she had not made a movement. He raised his hat, and showed a dark, curly head.

Aimée held out her hand, without daring to look at him.

"I thought that you were the doctor," said she, as soon as she could speak.

"No, it is only I," — there was a little bitterness in his voice, — "You must pardon me if I am late, but I have not much time, and I did not wish to leave without saying good-by."

"Leave?" repeated Aimée, trying to conceal her pallor.

He did not answer at once, and leaned against the gate.

"I am going home to America," said he, at last, "that is why I permitted myself" —

"Have you had news?" interrupted the young girl; "Maud — Mr. Wallson?"

"They are quite well, and have been at the Lindens for three days."

"Maud has come back!" cried she, drawing near him

quickly; "and you are going away? O no! you will not do that, will you?" She lifted to his her beautiful pleading eyes. "I beg of you, do not break her heart, she has loved you so long and deeply."

The young man listened without seeming to understand her, more and more surprised and stupefied.

"Promise me," continued the poor child, "that you will not make her suffer, that you will try to return — her love. Promise me."

"Anything you wish," he answered, his face radiant; he smiled in spite of himself, "but first, you must tell what you know."

She turned away her head.

"Maud wrote me" — she hesitated, "I have your promise, have I not?"

"Yes, you have my promise," — he was still smiling.

"Maud wrote me that she loved you, and that her affection dated from her childhood."

"Are you very sure of that? Did she name me?"

His eyes shone with an incredulous light.

Aimée breathed painfully.

"Yes," said she, "she wrote me that her affection for R—— was as old as herself. Those were her very words."

Joy, surprise, and emotion, were painted upon the young man's face.

"Aimée!" his voice was grave and moved, "I believe

that I know now why you would not hear me, why you left me so abruptly" — And his look, bright with pride and tenderness, rested upon the young girl.

"Aimée, listen to me; my brother's name and mine both begin with an R, but his is Raoul and mine is Roland."

She turned her head quickly.

"Maud and my brother," continued he, "have loved each other for years; they were only babies when they were pledged to each other; it was to have news of him that she liked to come to the factory, and to read my mother's letters. Now, all is arranged between them, and they will be married at once; Raoul will take Mr. Wallson's place, or mine, if—I return to America. Must I still go?" added he, bending towards her.

For all answer, Aimée raised her eyes, and, clasping her hands, pressed convulsively together,—"I am a foundling," murmured she.

She said no more, two arms clasped her closely, and two lips murmured strange words in her ear, —

"I have known that for a long time; I knew it before you, before Aunt Martha, before any one,—it is I, Roland, who lifted you from the tall grass, and carried you to Aunt Martha, and you, you are my very own, a find infinitely precious. Aimée, I have not such a bad memory as you have believed, I crossed the sea to find you once more; must I go back again?"

The pretty head bent itself upon his shoulder, and a "no" very low, but very distinct, was pronounced.

"Did you know that I was at the Lindens the first time I saw you there?" asked she, suddenly.

"No, certainly not; but I had already searched for you, and I was about to begin again, when I almost betrayed myself in hearing your name. How stupid and awkward you must have thought me!" added he, gayly.

"No, I only remember that I was sorry for you, but why did you not tell me afterwards?"

"I do not know, I feared Maud's questions. I was wrong. Later, I found a charm in this little mystery, and I resolved not to tell you, until I told you that I loved you. I did not know," added he, gravely, "what it would cost me thus to hide my identity."

He pressed her once more to his heart.

"We will not be parted again, shall we, my darling? To-morrow, we will go together to Arles, to see Mr. Arnould, then we will return to the Lindens, where I have left every one in desolation. And then, if you will consent, in a few weeks, when my brother comes, you will be mine, mine always, will you not, Aimée?"

He did not wait for her answer, but bent forward to kiss her.

"Do you know," said he, in a low voice, "that it was I who gave you your name, that pretty name which is true, which will always be true?"

Aimée's beautiful eyes shone with happiness.

And Aunt Martha's prayer was granted.

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